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LORD ULSWATER.

VOL. III.

LORD ULSWATER.

A Nobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LORD LYNN'S WIFE,"
"LADY FLAVIA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

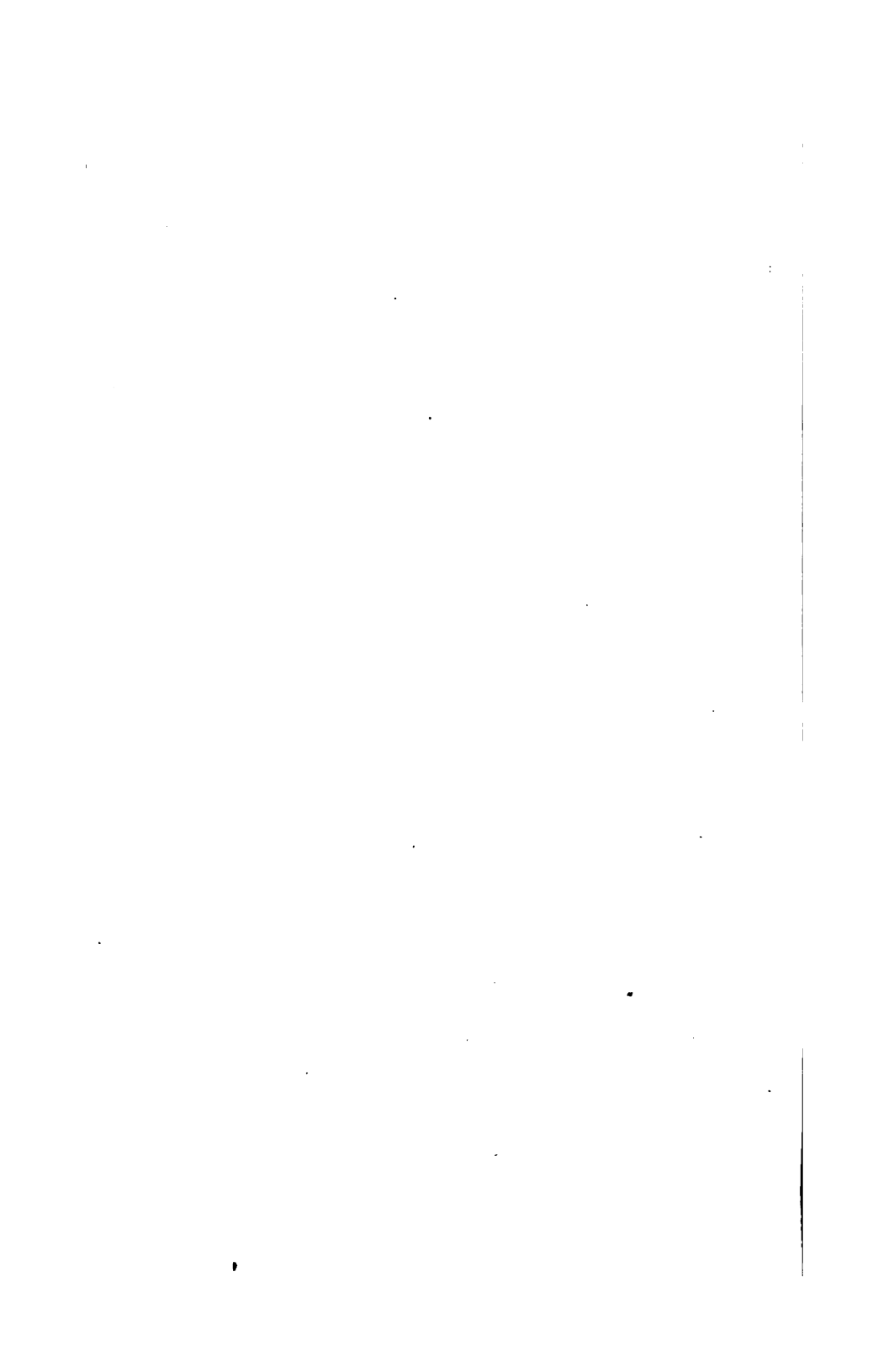
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LORD ULSWATER.



CHAPTER I.

BROUGHT BACK TO GRUPP'S.

"It's a sell. Depend upon it, Loys, my girl, the rascal of a doctor was merely gammoning you, and playing a double game, in my Lord's interest——" James Sark said, gloomily looking up from the little model, an improvement on the machinery in general use for quartz-crushing purposes among the Australian gold-fields, on which his dexterous fingers were busy.

His wife did not allow him to conclude the sentence. "No, no, Jem—a thousand times no. The man was in bitter earnest. He is a sour, vain, discontented sort of a man—I remember him of old—and Mr. Carnac has nettled his pride somehow. Greedy as Marsh

is for gain, I'm much mistaken if he would not rather lose some money than not play a spiteful trick to—— There! I can't bear to speak his name so often."

There was a marked difference between these two as regarded their manner of alluding to the owner of St. Pagans, for whereas Loys the wife never uttered his name without a sparkle of anger kindling itself in her lustrous eyes, and a scarlet spot of wrathful colour fluttering up into her dark-pale cheek, and a trembling in her rich voice that conveyed a threat, James the husband spoke of the common enemy with a philosophical indifference; and yet the returned transport had a reputation for a hot temper and a readiness to reward good with good, and harm with harm.

But James Sark, although he now knew a good deal of what Lord Ulswater had done and planned to his detriment, spoke of him with an easy indifference that contrasted oddly with the vindictiveness that expressed itself in his wife's looks and tones. Something of this jarred upon the woman's sensitive nature, for she

suddenly exclaimed : " It seems to me, James, you don't half hate that man."

To which James, smiling good-humouredly this time, glanced up from the wheels and rollers of his model at her flushed face : " Well, not very much," he said genially. " I know he's a great scoundrel, but then there are such lots of scoundrels, big and little, about the world. I don't hate him more than any other chap who has done me an ill turn, for his own profit, you know, not out of malice."

Loys drummed an angry tune with her foot upon the floor. " To sell you, Jem—to betray you, like that, by the help of a rogue attorney, and get you transported, was that kind ?"

Sark, very busy with his file upon a refractory crank, did not answer for a minute or so. Then he said, without looking up : " To tell the truth, lass, that news was a relief to me. It always went against me to plot, and scheme, and circumvent a gentleman that had done me a bit of a kindness, even for his own sake. Now I know Lawyer Moss and he were in league to trap me, why, we are quits, and something more."

"You forget, Jem, my, my shame—I was innocent before he tempted me, serpent that he is!" exclaimed Loys in a harsh, deep tone that had no music in it, and she fixed her dark eyes upon the floor.

Her husband quietly laid aside his tools, rose, and throwing his arm around her, drew her graceful head down upon his breast. "No one has a right to point a finger at you now, darling," he said, with a world of kindly and generous feeling in his good-humoured voice and his bright smile, and the very action of the caressing hand that was passed softly over her glossy braids of black hair. "You are a good and a true wife to me, and the best thing you can do is to blot out all those dark memories of a past that you have done with for ever. No, even for that, I can't hate the man much, because, who knows, my dear, if you had had nothing to repent of, nothing to confess, if you would ever have consented to marry such a good-for-nought ne'er-do-well as myself—and to be the sunshine of his life."

There was a long interval of silence, and then Loys shyly lifted her dark eyes and glanced

up in her husband's face, and reading there nothing but love and confidence, flung herself sobbing into his arms, and pressed her tear-stained cheek to his. "It's not sorrow now, dear," she cried, "but because I love you so much, my generous, good Jem, and I wish—how I wish——" The wish was unspoken, but the tears rained down fast, and we understood. It did seem a pity, to watch those two young persons, so truly and fondly faithful to one another, between whom there never passed cutting words or looks of unkindness, such as tarnish Love's wreath, and dim Hymen's torch sadly, in many an honest household—it did seem a pity that theirs should be a warfare with the world and the world's law, a sinful past, a clouded future. In each there were the elements of much that was good, and even great. Both were by nature more inclined to virtue than to vice, but in both there had been a restless impatience of control that had wrought fearfully for evil. It may be permitted to imagine some Utopia in which James Sark and Loys Fleming, innocent and hopeful, should have met, and loved, and wedded, and led lives of

honourable usefulness to themselves and to the world, and died with the affection, and respect, and esteem of rich and poor surrounding them to the last. But they had done amiss, and they found repentance difficult, and the track that should lead them back towards the Delectable Mountains was not seen as yet.

They sat, after this, talking more cheerfully for a while. They had many half-formed plans, but not one that would bear the test of examination. Both of them sincerely longed to eat honest bread, to earn an honest livelihood, and sin no more. The man had great talents and cleverness. Were he but honest, surely he might thrive, and James Sark felt that he had it in him to be honest, if the world would but give him a chance. To get that chance was the difficulty, for the world had been duped pretty often by sham penitents, and by penitents whose repentance was but skin-deep, and hence it has taken to receiving promises of future good-behaviour with frowning unbelief. James Sark, though a young man yet, was an old offender, and the reformation of old offenders is a hard

matter, as jail-chaplains and governors of model prisons are aware.

"America would be the best chance," said Dandy Jem at last—"the best chance. I could get employ at once in a Pennsylvania factory, as draughtsman or as engineer; or I might do well in New York or in Boston, and earn enough to live on; but I know Yankee Doodle pretty well, Loys, and I know that there's no country in which a bit of capital to start with is more useful to a man. Dollars grow dollars somehow, when the owner's neither a dunce nor a drunkard. If we had but that hundred pounds that you were so sure Lord Ulswater——"

"Don't, James, call him that. You know he's no Lord, if justice were done," interrupted Loys, but less petulantly than before; "and as for Mr. Carnac's sending the money to Perth, you may be sure he did send it. What is a hundred pounds out of his ill-got thousands and thousands. The only question is, will Palmer Brothers send it on safe, according to your instructions?"

This delicate point was discussed for some

time, and finally settled in the affirmative. Palmer Brothers belonged to that section of commercial firms that may be said to dwell in glass-houses, and which, to carry out the metaphor, cannot afford to indulge in perilous stone-throwing. Palmer Brothers had two sets of books and two trades, the more gainful and secret of which it was expedient to keep from the knowledge of the authorities; and James Sark could have told tales that Palmer Brothers would have kept untold at any reasonable cost; wherefore they were tolerably certain to prove discreet and immaculate custodians of Lord Ulswater's remittance. With that hundred pounds, when it should come back from its voyage to the antipodes, this pair of modern Ishmaelites could try their fortune in the New World. The newer world of Australia would have been better still for their purpose, but then there was that condemnation and unexpired term of penal servitude to bar the way. It was a risk. Jem might do well in Victoria, make money, be returned to the Legislative Assembly, and dine with Her Majesty's representative at Government House. Or, re-

cognised by some untoward policeman, he might come too early under the notice of the colonial Attorney-general, and be sent back, in irons and a yellow jacket, to complete his sentence. America was safer. But a disturbing element in the calculation was the possible course of him whom Loys persisted in mentioning as John Carnac, and never as Lord Ulswater.

The notion that Mr. Marsh was merely an agent of Lord Ulswater's, and that his mission to London was in truth to discover Sark's hiding-place, and procure his arrest, had naturally suggested itself to the latter. One circumstance certainly went far towards confirming this hypothesis: Mr. Marsh had broken his pledge. The appointment to meet Loys and her husband behind the wood-piles at the river-side had not been kept. The husband and wife had gone to the rendezvous, and had waited there for hours and hours in vain. Nothing had been seen of the Shellton doctor. Had he been taken ill? Was he unavoidably prevented from coming to the place agreed upon? Or was he a spy, and his grudge against Lord Ulswater a mere feint? Jem opined to the latter con-

clusion. Not so, however, did Loys. Women are naturally, perhaps, more disposed to suspicion than men are; but in this case Loys held fast to her conviction, that the surgeon hated his former patron with a strong hate. She had heard him speak; she had seen the working of his features as he talked of Lord Ulswater; she was sure that he had not been acting a part, sure that he spoke sincerely. But it was very strange that he did not come to the wood-pile on the wharf, he who had been so eager to press matters on to a crisis. Why had he broken his word?

"We were late, you know, Jem—late by half an hour or more. He was always a touchy, fretful man. Perhaps he got out of temper and went away," suggested Loys at last.

James Sark shook his head. "Men that are in earnest don't stickle at such trifles," he said: "I am afraid he means us no good, lassie. If one knew where he lodged, now——"

"But I do know," cried Loys, clapping her hands as a child might have done. "He said he should go back to—— I had it on my very tongue but a moment since, and now I can't

remember it. Isn't it provoking?" and the bright smile on her lips died away.

"Try—try to recollect it," urged her husband.

But Memory is a nymph whose nimble feet defy pursuit, as they dart amid the mazes of her own labyrinth. Nothing is more annoying than to feel how near is the lost fact, and yet to hunt for it in vain. Cudgel our tired brains as we will, we strive in vain. There stands poor Cassim—good Ali Baba's unworthy brother—at the iron door of the robbers' treasure-cave, and he tears his turban, and beats his breast, and bawls out the names of millet, and dhurra, and rice, and all grains but sesamé, and the cruel door will not open. Lo! there it stands, fixed as fate, and already steeds come trampling and neighing through the woods, and scimitars shine, and the gang come riding home to cut Cassim into quarters.

But when we give up the chase, and the bow of thought is unstrung, and we are slowly wending our way homewards, back comes the coy nymph, Memory, tripping to our side, a willing captive. Unbidden, the recollection came to Loys, about the time when the lamps

were lighted, and the evening twilight had closed in.

"Grupp's!" she cried suddenly, springing up and clapping her hands as joyously as before—"Grupp's—that is the name. It comes back to me clearly now. Mr. Marsh mentioned that name, and no other."

Reference to a yellow-bound copy of *Bradshaw* that lay in a corner of the room disclosed the further fact, as advertised by Grupp, that the private hotel and boarding-house of that name was situated in Arundel Street.

"Arundel Street is not a very great way off," said Dandy Jem good-humouredly, laying down his newspaper. "Put your bonnet on, Loys, and we'll go round there together and ask a quiet question or two."

Ten minutes later, the pair sallied out into the yellow lamp-light and the struggling gleam of the dying day. They were soon in Arundel Street.

Within twenty steps of Grupp's door, Loys suddenly stopped, and the hand that rested on her husband's sinewy arm trembled as she clung to him. "Jem!" she exclaimed, "I hear some-

thing—a noise of voices, and here come men hurrying. O Jem, dear, it's not for myself I am frightened, but you, dear——” She stood gazing with dilated eyes at a small crowd hurrying, clamorous, up from the river-side.

Sark was perfectly cool. “There's no fear—these are not police. Some accident. Stand back, my girl, and let them pass,” he said; and Loys, still trembling, obeyed. She was as brave as a lioness, this woman, when her own safety was in question, but she was cowardly for those she loved. She soon saw that her husband was right.

On they came, a large group rather than a mob, composed chiefly of rough water-side men and boys, with a sprinkling of women and shrill children hanging on the skirts of the crowd. In the centre were four men, two of whom belonged to the Thames police, bearing on their shoulders, on a stretcher, something—something covered up—something that was wet and slimy beneath the tarpaulin that screened it, and from which trickled down muddy little rills of river-water, making pools upon the gritty pavement. Fifty voices were to be heard, all at once, shouting,

speaking, or swelling an inarticulate sort of roar, as the stretcher was borne on.

“Here it is, policeman, here it is!” cried several of the better informed, pointing to Grupp’s lamp and Grupp’s brass plate, and Grupp’s door. The stretcher and its burden came to a halt there. They hardly knew why they did so, Loys and her husband, but they pushed on, elbowing a way through the bystanders, to the front.

“What is it?”

That was a welcome question, to which answers could not be lacking.

“A bad job!”

“Found in the river!”

“Gentleman murdered!”

“Staying, it’s supposed, at Grupp’s.”

“Grupp’s card found in his pocket!”

“Drowned, I say!”

“Not a bit of it, stupid. Skull smashed in with a hammer, sir, most dreadful. Drowned, indeed!”

And the crowd took up the word “Murdered,” and rolled it over their tongues, and bandied it to and fro with much zest and infinite relish.

.

With all her faults, Loys was womanly, and she had none of that ghoul-like taste for the horrible, merely because it is horrible, which is so potent with the coarser of her sex. She tried, therefore, to draw back from the bearers and their fearful load, into the close neighbourhood of which she had been thrust by the pressure of the fast increasing crowd, now swelled by reinforcements from the swarming Strand above. But to break through what was fast becoming a wall of human beings was not an easy task; and she turned her face, involuntarily, round, and gave a suppressed shriek, unheeded in the midst of the general outcry and babble. She pressed her husband's arm: "Look, Jem, look!"

James Sark did look; and what James Sark saw was an ugly and a gruesome sight to see. Grupp, and Grupp's wife, and the barmaid, chambermaid, waiter, and all that ate Grupp's bread, and owed him allegiance, had come out to the door, vehemently to protest against the entry of that ghastly guest. How, Grupp demanded, was he to know whether the gent. ever had been a customer of his? Was he

bound, he should like to be told, to take in all the corpses and drowned dead bodies of no one knew who, that the Thames police might fish up out of the river? Only tell Grupp that. For there were no negro slaves in this free country; and an Englishman's house was his castle; and he, Grupp, would not be ridden roughshod over by living or dead. All which sentiments Grupp's wife, daughter, and female retainers shrilly chorussed.

To convince incredulous Grupp, the tarpaulin was taken off, and the body revealed, a proceeding which elicited a rush and a deep drawing of breath from the mob, as if it had been the transformation scene of a pantomime. The yellow gaslight fell on the white, upturned, sightless face of the dead man. A grim spectacle was he, as the curious eyes of the bystanders saw him, by that wavering light. There was slime and mud on his wet garments, and in his matted black hair; and there were dark stains and clots of something that was more like a dull crimson cement than anything else. The head was bare, and it was evident that the whole crown of the skull had been smashed and

battered in by the blows of some sharp and heavy instrument—the same, no doubt, that had gashed the forehead so fearfully, below the left temple.

Grupp looked, and grew a little more sallow than before, as if the sight gave him a qualm.

“You can bring it in,” he said reluctantly: “he did lodge here. His luggage, such as it is, is upstairs yet. Bring him in as quiet as you can. There’ll be noise enough and fuss enough at the inquest.”

Loys leaned heavily on her husband’s arm.

“Take me home, James,” she said: “this is dreadful. It’s the doctor himself, poor wretch!”

“What doctor?” asked Jem. “Surely not——”

“Mr. Marsh: it’s he that’s murdered,” whispered Loys with white lips; and as the crowd slowly broke up, she and her husband went home.

Loys was not mistaken: the Shelton surgeon, and no other, was that silent guest that had just been brought back to Grupp’s.

CHAPTER II.

MR. MOSS IS CONVINCED.

“WHO is Mr. N. Moss, of the Old Jewry, and what can such a person want?” asked Lady Harriet, with that peculiar air of being about to take offence which is natural to stiff-backed women. She was in the Tapestry Room, as usual, and the card which Hicks the butler had brought in some fifteen minutes earlier lay on the table before her, and was an eyesore to her aristocratic vision. It was Lord Ulswater for whom this Hebraically named visitor had asked, not for Lady Harriet; but the noble master of the abbey was absent, and had been seen with the head-gamekeeper, at the gate communicating with the home farm, inspecting some young dogs, of whose performance, during the coming season of partridge-slaying, great things were

predicted. There was nothing for it but to request the "gentleman from London" to wait.

"Moss," said Lord Ulswater carelessly, "is a solicitor whom I sometimes employ. A good sort of hard-working lawyer in his own line.—Where is he? The Tower Room, I think you mentioned? He has come on business, of course, and I had better go and learn what it is." So Lord Ulswater took his way to the Tower Room.

Lady Harriet, left behind, shook her head with a long shake of disapprobation. The recognised family solicitors were Castles and Taping, of Old Square, Lincoln's Inn—a safe, slow, broad-wheeled wagon of a firm, not to be hurried, but not to be upset either, by side-winds of speculation, as some more specious law-agencies are apt to be. The good old maid had a prejudice against legal gentlemen with Hebrew names, and was sorry to hear that John, present wearer of the coronet, should have dealings with the Semitic race.

"When I wrote to you, Moss, I hardly expected to see you so soon, or, indeed—to see you at all, here, I mean;" such was Lord Uls-

water's greeting to the brisk, spruce little attorney whom he found in the Tower Room. "You know my system by this time."

Mr. Moss looked even more like a sparrow than before as he put his head on one side and threw a sparkle of jocular cunning into his bead-like eyes. His coat, of sporting cut, his profuse display of jewellery, his blue and white neck-scarf, fastened by a ruby-studded horseshoe of fine gold, his tan gloves, whipstick, and the white hat that he had laid on a carved oak-table beside him, jarred oddly with the associations of that huge monastic apartment. He was an irritating anachronism, that little man from the Old Jewry, standing in the Tower Room at St. Pagans.

He had some spirit, though, this defender of thieves and frequenter of betting-rooms, and he met Lord Ulswater's gaze unabashed. "I know very well, my Lord, that you prefer to keep the man that does your dirty work out of the way of your swell friends," said Mr. Moss sturdily; "and I'm not the sort of person, cad as you may think me, to intrude myself where I'm not wanted. But I am a good man of business to a

good paymaster, and you are that, my Lord Ulswater. So I think, in pelting down here by the early train, to the injury of my regular business, I've deserved a better reception than you seem inclined to give me." And there was an air of injured merit about the attorney which confirmed his statement.

Lord Ulswater had been looking serious and stern, but now a frank, bright smile broke out like actual sunshine, and lit up his handsome face, and the old charm that never man or woman resisted came back to his manner.

"Sit down, Moss," he said genially; "and excuse my churlishness. I have had much to annoy me of late.—No, not money, which I see you are thinking of: I've enough of that; but a man who is about to marry has often as much on his hands as suffices to sour his temper. I wish Castles and Taping were at the bottom of the sea, sometimes. If you were my only lawyer, Moss, I don't think I should have so many vexatious delays to complain of. And I really do not see why I should not take my business out of those people's hands—do you?"

Mr. Moss blinked his bright little eyes, and

ducked his well-oiled head, and rubbed his plump hands approvingly. He understood Lord Ulswater well enough. To be sole solicitor to the House of Carnac would repay him for many a slight, and for much trouble. But, he was a great deal too shrewd to calculate on the performance of a promise so vaguely expressed, so he turned from the glittering vision, and explained his errand.

“My Lord,” the attorney began, “in the first place, on getting your letter, I set certain agencies to work, to find out whether the party you mentioned really was in England. The police thought it impossible. Orders had been given to prevent his leaving West Australia—so I understand, and also to examine the list of home-coming passengers, with a view to apprehend Sark. So I gather that your Lordship has put a spoke in his wheel, of which I knew nothing?”

The owner of St. Pagans nodded assent.

Mr. Moss resumed: “Some other acquaintances of mine, who don’t wear blue tunics, with white lettering on the collars, but who know a thing or two, are not quite of the opinion of

Scotland Yard. No one has set eyes on Dandy Jem ; but Jem's wife was seen, in Clapham, not many days ago, by a lad now in trouble ; I've got to defend him—a mere area-sneak—but he was in court the day of Sark's trial, and remembered his wife fainting when the verdict was given against him."

"Clapham ! an unlikely place to look for Loys Fleming ! Can she be nursery-governess in a serious family ? or is Sark himself hiding there in the disguise of a reader, or teetotal lecturer, I wonder ?" said Lord Ulswater, with well-feigned indifference.—"No other news, Moss ?" He had watched the attorney's face while he told his tale, and saw plainly that Mr. Moss had not yet played out all his hand. It was the card in reserve for which his client waited.

The lawyer's eyes twinkled as he thrust his hand into a pocket of his tight-fitting coat and dragged out a crumpled newspaper, a thin, creased newspaper of that day's issue, and that still seemed damp as when the early news-boy left it at Mr. Moss's door. "I'm an early riser," said the attorney, with the slightly fatuous

complacency without which it seems impossible to mention that meritorious habit—"always was. We know what the bird must do that picks up the worm, he! he! my Lord, and it isn't easy to catch *me* napping of a morning. And I always take a peep at the paper before breakfast. I saw something in this that made me send out my skipjack in his pantry-jacket running for a cab, as if a cab had been a fire-engine; and I hardly took time to swallow my coffee—paid double-fare for a scamper to the railway terminus, and saved the train. Here I am; and this"—he gave a thump with his fist to the crumpled paper—"this brought me."

Lord Ulswater, who possessed more than one of the qualities of the great John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, sat serenely calm, surveying the excited little legal practitioner with perfect composure. But very likely this grand indifference was a mere mask, beneath which were hidden impatience, apprehension, and a dim foreboding of woe and calamity to come. "Well, Moss," he said, coolly, as the attorney unfolded the paper, with fingers that were less

steady than usual, "I am waiting for the development of this tragedy of yours."

"Tragedy you may well call it," returned Mr. Moss, as he hunted for the desired paragraph. "Ah! to be sure—here it is." And without further preface, he began to read aloud. "'The Great Cumberland Street Murder.—Additional particulars have transpired since yesterday with respect to this cold-blooded and atrocious crime. Our readers will remember——'"

"Very likely they will," interrupted Lord Ulswater; "but I have not the honour to be one of their readers. Spare me that penny-a-liner's jargon, Moss, please. It is a literary language quite *sui generis*, and it sets my teeth on edge, however pleasantly it may titillate the ears of others. So, if you will kindly translate that high-flown rubbish into sober English, I will listen, and be thankful. There has been a murder, then? Do I know the victim?"

Mr. Moss looked Lord Ulswater in the face, straight between the eyes, as he would have done in an interview with one of his customary

clients, guests of the governor of Newgate. "Yes, I think so," he said, bluntly.

"What is the name, then?" asked Lord Ulswater very quietly; and then suddenly starting and flushing crimson, he exclaimed: "Not that woman—not Sark's wife?"

There was a dreadful longing and eagerness implied in the tone in which those last words were uttered, a longing and an eagerness that would have shocked most men. But Mr. Moss was case-hardened, and not squeamish. He shook his head. "No woman, my Lord. A dead body, that of a gentleman, was found in the river, and was conveyed to a private hotel in Arundel Street, Grupp's by name, on account of a printed card of the hotel being found about the murdered man's person. It was a murder, plainly. The surgeons agreed on that. Skull beaten in by blows of some sharp, heavy implement—perhaps a crowbar or a shipwright's chisel. Robbery not apparently the object. The watch had been snatched away, certainly, part of the broken watch-guard remaining behind, but the money in the pockets, gold and silver, was untouched; so was a porte-monnaie

or pocket-book, in which was a fifty-pound note of the Bank of England, quite new, with the name of William Morgan, M.P., endorsed upon it."

Lord Ulswater could not repress a second start. "Morgan! surely not!" he said. "His sister, poor thing, told me he was abroad, on his way to Egypt. Is the body his? Impossible!"

"Not Mr. Morgan's, by any means," returned the attorney; "but I was going to say that it is a curious circumstance that of the cash being found intact. It was a Thames police-boat that picked the corpse up, floating out with the tide. They fancy, at Scotland Yard, that the murderer took the watch to give some sort of colour to the act, as a common crime, done for common motives of plunder, and that he meant to rifle the victim, and was disturbed by some one. At any rate, they have found the place, among the wood-piles at the bottom of Great Cumberland Street, where the deed was done. The saw-dust and shavings were soaked with blood, and a crushed hat, with the name of Stephen Marsh——"

"Marsh—of Shellton—the apothecary?" cried Lord Ulswater, springing up from his chair.

"That was the name in the hat; and Mrs. Marsh has been communicated with—so the paper says—and is expected in London to-day, to identify——"

"Is any one suspected? Do they know, or guess, who did it?" interrupted Lord Ulswater, pacing the room with rapid strides.

Mr. Moss shook his head dubiously. "They talk in the usual oracular way," he said: "police on the track—important clue—and so forth, with obvious reasons for not being more explicit at present; but one never knows whether this is mere kidment—beg pardon, my Lord, kidment means empty talk—or whether they have genuine information."

Lord Ulswater continued to pace the room, as men do when they are strongly stirred by some unwelcome tidings. "Poor wretch!" he said impulsively. "When I wrote to you to have him watched, if possible, to see if, in his trip to London, he should hold any communication with Sark and his wife—you bungled that business, I must say, Moss—I little thought——"

A clownish, butcherly act. Do *you* suspect any one in particular, pray, Mr. Moss?" he added, wheeling short round upon the attorney.

Mr. Moss rose too. "I did suspect somebody," he said, winking and nodding with great significance; "but since I came here—eh?—Mercy on us! my Lord——"

The last words were spoken in a sort of screech, like that of a hen in the hawk's claws; for Lord Ulswater had suddenly caught up his legal adviser, as a strong man might lift an infant, and in a moment more the wretched little attorney found his body thrust through the deep embrasure of the open window, and dangling, helpless, over the gaping depth below, nothing but sky above, nothing but sea below, and four hundred feet of sheer precipice, by which to measure the perils of a fall.

"This is beyond a joke—mercy—I meant——" gurgled the smart little lawyer, as all the sins of his life crowded on his memory at once, and he looked down at the giddy gulf that intervened between him and the sea, and his brain reeled, and he shut his eyes, and groaned, and tried to pray. He was not a coward; but ordinary

courage counts for nothing in face of such a prospect as that of imminent, sudden, inevitable death. He was faint and sick when the mighty arms that had pushed him through the deep window lifted him back into the room with equal ease, and dropped him, helpless, on a sofa. He recovered from what was almost a swoon, to see Lord Ulswater standing over him smiling.

"Listen, Moss," he said. "Once, when that poor hound who has gone to his account came here drunk, and tried to get good terms from me by bullying, it was all I could do to refrain from lifting him through that very window, as I lifted you just now, and tossing him, like a pebble, down into the sea that roared and surged four hundred feet below. Do you take warning : never think to get a hold on me by fear, lest you burn your fingers. And for the matter of that, your fancy that *I* knocked that troublesome fellow on the head is a very absurd one. Fifty people could swear to my being here, or at Shellton Manor, all the time. Pshaw! Moss; do you think I am fool enough to bruise my own flesh for the sake of crushing a teasing

gnat like that? You ought to know me better, man."

The attorney adjusted his ruffled cravat, and smoothed down his glossy whiskers. He was much disturbed in soul. Had Lord Ulswater been an ordinary man, his natural pugnacity would have been roused to avenge the late affront he had experienced; but Mr. Moss would as soon have pitted himself against a Bengal tiger as against this radiant, hard, ruthless client of his, all whose habitual suavity seemed to have been reassumed in an instant. So, instead of flying at Lord Ulswater's throat, Mr. Moss began an apology for his implied suspicions, an apology which was graciously accepted.

"This has been a confidential interview, you know, and we understand each other quite well now," remarked Lord Ulswater.—"By the way, does it not occur to you that Sark may have struck the blow?"

Mr. Moss had not thought of such a probability before, nor did he put faith in it then, but it was not for him to contradict a client of Lord Ulswater's stamp. He snapped, therefore, at the idea, and volunteered to get handbills posted,

before night, offering a reward for Sark's apprehension. "The government have proposed to give a hundred on conviction : we might add another," he suggested.

Lord Ulswater knit his brows. "No," he said, after a moment's hesitation—"no. On no account help the police to capture that man; on no account lay a fresh charge against him, false or true, until you hear from me again. I—I cannot quite decide; but find him out if you can. If it costs me a thousand pounds, find him, and do not lose a moment in letting me know his address. Don't telegraph particulars. The Shellton gossips have long ears. The address will do alone."

Mr. Moss promised implicit and discreet obedience; and then, as the attorney must of necessity be hungry, unless, indeed, his aerial prospect from the outside of the old Tower window had taken away his appetite, Lord Ulswater rang for refreshments. Had Castles come down on business, or had Taping come down, those eminent solicitors would have been asked to stay and partake of luncheon or of dinner in a regular way, and even stiff Lady

Harriet would have been condescendingly civil and kind to the respected family lawyers, who had it in their power to make the wheels of family monetary arrangements run smoothly or the reverse, and to whom many a tangled mortgage account was clear. But Lord Ulswater was too experienced to expect his proud old aunt to sit at table in such company as that of Mr. Moss of the Old Jewry and the Old Bailey.

Mr. Moss, in spite of the curtailment of his breakfast, and his hurried journey to the seaside, could not eat much. He was a healthy little man enough, and, to use his own expression, could usually play as good a knife and fork as anybody; but the edge was taken off his appetite for that one day. The glimpse he had had of the green shoal water, flecked with white froth, where the rocks approached the surface, had been too much for his nerves. But he drank several glasses of sherry; and as he got into his hack basket-carriage to be driven back to Shellton Station, he grasped in his hot flabby hand the cool strong hand that Lord Ulswater held out to him, and swore, inwardly, to be true liegeman to his dangerous client for life.

CHAPTER III.

BRUM'S ADVICE.

"A PERSON wants to see you, please, sir, which he is a shabby-looking old person in a greatcoat. He's waiting downstairs, with his dirty shoes on the new oilcloth, and won't say what he wants ; and I'm a'most frightened of him, missus being out, and me alone in the lower part of the house." Thus spoke the red-elbowed maid-servant who did the manifold work of Mrs. Britton's lodging-house, in Cecil Street, Strand.

James Sark, busy with his model, looked up, vexed at the interruption. Loys his wife gave a little start as she sat sewing beside the window, and let the linen and the threaded needle drop upon her lap. "Some old clothes-man ! Tell him I've no cast-off waistcoats to sell, can't you !" said Dandy Jem, rather peevishly.

Much confinement to the house, in the case of a man of active habits, is apt to damp the spirits and sour the temper. The ex-topman of the *Blakcap* was growing irritable, as the weary days went by in the hot, dull London street.

"To tell you the truth, mum," said the girl, addressing herself to Loys, "I'm half afraid to tell the man to go. He's very queer-mannered. I've noticed him this last two or three days, a-slinking and a-blinking about, up and down before the house, and a-peeping down the area, and a-looking up at the windows. I thought he was Rags and Bones at first, but not he; and I'd half a mind to ask our policeman, which he is a civil young man from Hertfordshire, as I am myself, to send him packing. I wish I had."

"Did he ask for any one by name, or did he merely say he should like to speak to somebody?" inquired Loys suddenly, and she put away her needlework, and rose from her chair.

"Gives a double rat-tat at the door, like his impudence, and walks in as bold as brass, mum. Name of Fletcher? says he. You mean the first floor? says I, and then——"

"Hold your chattering tongue!" exclaimed Sark ill-humouredly. "I must put a stop to this." And he pushed away his model and his tool-box, and got up from his seat; but before he could reach the door, it opened, revealing the figure of a lean, shambling old man, in a brown greatcoat.

"Excuse me," said the intruder, with a grotesque bow, and a flourish of his battered hat—"excuse me, sir, and madam both. Being so old an acquaintance, though lately lost sight of, I took the liberty. How d'ye do, Mr. F.? And how are you, ma'am?"

The Professor was quite at his ease; and his secretive and cynical soul was gratified by his observing how very red and pale by turns grew the bold bronzed face of that notorious daredevil, Dandy Jem, and how the veins on his broad low forehead swelled, blue and big, and his attitude and look denoted a strong desire to pitch the interloper through the open window into the street.

Old Brum enjoyed all this, as some men enjoy the pattering of the hail and the roar and shriek of the wind while they sit, warm and

snug, before the blazing fire. He knew that by a word he could work a change in the other's mood, and he was amused by the mingled surprise, rage, and alarm which his knowing eyes detected in Sark's face. But women, with their intuitive tact, smooth away many an obstacle at which men only rive and tear, like Titans beneath Etna. Loys glided forward, a smile of welcome on her face. "I'm sure we are glad to see you, Professor—my husband as well as myself; but how you startled us! We thought you abroad still, and James here hardly knew you, I declare. Sit down, Professor, and we must have a good long talk, now you have found us.—That will do!"

This last sentence, with somewhat of an imperative ring in the sound of it, was addressed to the wondering servant-maid, who slowly left the room, with the very natural intention of applying her ear to the keyhole. But against this piece of domestic strategy Loys guarded, by instantly following the maid from the room, and impelling her down to the lower regions of the house, in quest of certain refreshments of which the visitor might in due course of time be

inclined to partake, Mrs. Sark all the while explaining, with apparently unpremeditated frankness, that the Professor was a worthy old man, very well-meaning, but a bit of a miser, and eccentric, whom she and Mr. Fletcher had known in foreign parts.

Old Brum and James Sark were left alone together. "*I* don't tell you, old man, that *I* am glad to see you," said the returned transport, speaking in a cool, determined tone; "I only tell you that I wait to know why you have ferreted me out, and what you want with me."

The Professor's red eyes twinkled maliciously. "Guess, Jem, guess!" he said, and then began to laugh and to cough, until he was out of breath, and bent his lank old body to and fro in his armchair, gasping.

"I know you, Brum, and you know me," said the Manxman, who had never once averted his eyes from those bleared ones of the visitor. "I hardly think you would sell a pal to the Philistines, but such things happen now and then. But of this I'm sure, anyhow. You are sharp enough to know that you wouldn't get the reward, whatever it is, if there were a dozen of

the police lurking round this house, ready to run in at your whistle." And Sark fell to fingering a long steel file, triangular, firmly fixed in a stout handle of dark wood, and bearing, with its fine point and keen edges, a considerable resemblance to a stiletto.

The Professor felt that it was time to lay aside pleasantries, and explain himself. "Hark ye, Jem," he said earnestly; "I mean you no harm—quite the contrary. I'm not an ungrateful beggar, and I've not forgot how you and madam there stood by me when I was down in the fever, and poor, out in Perth, W. A. Twist my neck, if ever you catch me hurting you or yours—it'll serve me right." A violent fit of coughing here cut short the Professor's eloquence, but after it had left him with watery eyes and aching lungs, he resumed his discourse. "Let us be fair and above board, Jem," he said, laying a skinny finger on Sark's powerful wrist. "If I told you gratitude was the only thing that brought me here, prying and asking about, till I found out your lodgings and your name you went by, you'd say I was chaffing you. If I say I want to turn a penny

by you, you'd believe that quick enough. Yet, as true as I've got a plant for getting out a lot of Russian rouble-notes, and don't know a chap who'd manage the water-mark and the cashier's signature so well as you could hit 'em off, true as that, even, I've a hankering to help them as was good to me in that furnace of a summer, on the other side of the world. You needn't believe me. I am such an old rip, I can't expect it."

Loys had softly re-entered the room before these last words were spoken. She came forward and put her hand fondly on her husband's shoulder. Her bright eyes had been looking at the Professor as searchingly as if they had really the power to penetrate his high narrow forehead, and read his thoughts, before they had found their way from the brain to the tongue.

"I think we may trust Brum. I am sure we may," she said kindly and positively.

Sark threw down the sharp-pointed steel file that bore so marked a resemblance to a stiletto. "I wish nothing better than to be friends, Professor," he said, reseating himself. "I'm getting cross and crusty, boxed up here as

I am. I wonder how you knew we were here."

The Professor nodded and chuckled, and coughed more than ever. He was vain of his own skill, as are most men of his moral calibre. "Old, worn-out, toothless Brum," he remarked, with a chuckle between every word of self-disparagement, "can see as far into a millstone as most. I know a thing or two. Something about a fine Lord, down in the country, that would fill my old hat with sovereigns, if I'd sell you, which I won't. Something of a seedy doctor from Shellton, that had a long talk with somebody, behind the wood-piles in Great Cumberland Street, and would have had another, next night, with——"

"You are a wizard, I think," interrupted the Manxman, striking his hand hard upon the table.

"I know more than that," cried old Brum exultingly; "I know who did for the poor devil of a doctor; and that's more than any other man in London does know."

"Do you mean the murder—of poor Dr. Marsh?" asked Loys, in a low, fearful tone,

her cheek blanching at the dreadful remembrance of the white, upturned face at Grupp's door.

But on this score all the old man's communicativeness seemed suddenly to desert him. Murder, he observed, was out of his line altogether—he had always kept out of scrapes of that sort; and he didn't want to be mixed up in them now, with one foot in the grave. He could give as good a guess as another—that was all.

“Give a dog a bad name, though, and you can tag the rest of the saying, Jem, I suppose,” remarked the Professor in conclusion. “I know, particular well, you never struck a foul blow in your days, and you was allays a gentleman among us cross coves, you was. But I shouldn't wonder if somebody were to put that very job down to your score, and I shouldn't wonder if twelve men in a jury-box were to say, ‘Guilty, my Lord.’”

Loys gave a little laugh of indignant unbelief. “Every one would know it was a lie!” she said hotly.

But her husband shook his head. “I

shouldn't wonder, lass, if they did. Nothing is too bad to be laid on the shoulders of such as James Sark, the runaway convict," he said sadly, but without much bitterness. It was his own fault, he knew, if honest folks were ready to believe his sins more scarlet than they were. Let the hawk get his living never so blamelessly by pouncing on snake, and weazel, and field-mouse, the farmer's wife will still rejoice mightily when the keeper has nailed him to the barn-door, as the enemy alike of chicken, duckling, and partridge.

The Professor had a keen sense of enjoyment in the triumph of his own opinions. He drummed hard with his lean forefinger upon the dented crown of his hat. "Your goodman sees it, ma'am Sark; he sees it," cackled the old man with his quavering, senile laugh of self-gratulation. "Such a lot of evidence, you know," he went on, telling off the points of the argument upon his fingers: "evidence of previous convictions, one; absent, on French leave, from the tothermost side of the world, two; Mrs. Sark's talks with the poor doctor, first at the corner of Cecil Street, next down by the

river, three, four ; now the going out, after dark, of both of you, and your being seen down by the wood-piles, that's the thumb. And suppose there's a good sharp lawyer—Moss, for instance—to rake up facts, and the government bigwigs, and somebody down in the country to spend his cash pretty free—why, tchick !” And with a shrill, clucking sound like that of cork-drawing, the Professor put the end of a blue handkerchief round his own scraggy neck, and jerked up his sharp elbow with very expressive pantomime.

“I believe he's right, Loys,” said James Sark gloomily.

Further conversation on the same topic was prevented by the entry of the lodging-house maid with a tray ; and bottles were produced from a cupboard, and beer was fetched in a jug, and Brum ate and drunk with great enjoyment of his fare. The servant-girl, in consequence of what Mrs. Fletcher had said, eyed this untidy guest from a new point of view, contemplating him with respectful curiosity, in his character of a miser, and watching him as if she expected to see rouleaux of gold drop casually out of his

pockets, or rolls of bank-notes peep from beneath the frayed lining of his greasy hat.

When they were again alone together, the Professor unfolded his plan, and pressed its advantages forcibly upon James Sark and his wife. His project was simply that the couple should change their lodgings without delay for an abode the security of which he, Brum, would guarantee.

The old man's advice was the more readily accepted on account of its chiming so well with the half-formed resolution which the Manxman had that morning expressed to leave Cecil Street. The refuge which Brum suggested was a more obscure one, and one which might be expected to baffle pursuit. And the Professor, who was very cunning in his way, roughly sketched a plan by which the Sarks and their effects could be transferred to their new quarters, without the knowledge of any myrmidons of the law who might happen to be on duty for the purpose of observing the movements of the suspected. Sark himself added the details needful to perfect this project, and a treaty of alliance was concluded between Brum and his young friends.

In the course of that very afternoon, the Professor having gone, and Mrs. Britton having returned, that pattern of landladies was nearly rendered hysterical by the announcement that her model lodgers intended to leave her house, and London, forthwith. But she was comforted by payment of a week's extra rent, and wished them a pleasant journey as they were borne off, trainwards, in a laden cab. Falmouth was the ostensible goal of the journey, and to embark in an American-bound steamer its purport. The luggage was duly labelled, and the tickets were duly taken, per second class, to the furthest available point of railway communication with the West, and in due course of time the bell clanged, and the train started.

Late that night, having made the strangest zig-zag flight, by help of branch lines, omnibuses, and flies, that ever was taken by human travellers, in imitation, apparently, of the eccentricities of a snipe on the wing, Loys and her husband were driven up to the door of a lonely suburban public-house that had been famous and busy in the old coaching days, but that was now a melancholy brick-and-mortar ghost of its old

jovial self. There were long ranges of ruinous stabling, where once fifty horses had neighed an ovation to the corn-bin—mildewed sheds, where a row of yellow post-chaises had awaited the call of “first turn out,” but which, like the old drivers in their spruce jackets and neat boots, and the old customers, had turned out for ever and a day. There was a feeble light twinkling through the window of that tap-room, in which the noisiest and most arrogant footmen of the Georgian reigns had bawled and bragged over their beer, and from this tap Brum came slinking at the sound of wheels.

“All right, Jem, eh? Any traps at the station?” he said; and without waiting for a reply, added: “but there! one never knows. Let the coachman wash out his nags’ mouths, if he wants to—they seem to have come at a goodish pace, and then I’ll get on the box and tell him where to drive. It’s the last place where you’ll be looked for, down yonder among the market-gardens.”

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE CLIFF.

“I QUITE agree with Mrs. Hastings, John, if it is to be, it had better be done quickly—the marriage, I mean,” Lady Harriet Ashe had said, for about the twentieth time ; and Lord Ulswater had replied by some half-jesting allusion to the law’s delays, and had gone out. His bachelor home at St. Pagans was not very pleasant to him now. Somehow he found himself the mark for suspicion, resentment, or ill-will on every hand. His aunt had been colder, odder, and less placable ever since Ruth Morgan’s death. She appeared, tacitly, to regard Lord Ulswater as guilty of cutting short that innocent life ; and indeed it was undeniable that that unlucky scene among the ruins at St. Pagans had given a fatal shake to the hour-glass from which the few

last sands of Ruth's existence were trickling away.

Lady Harriet had never prized her dead favourite so much when living as she did after the loss of her. She wore as deep mourning for poor Ruth as if the black had been put on for her own nearest kindred. She openly bewailed the estrangement between the unfortunate sister and scapegoat of Fortunatus Morgan and herself, and but just stopped short of a direct accusation against her nephew as the author of the whole evil. Never had she been really fond of gay, gallant John Carnac—never had she been quite able to forgive him for having eclipsed his feeble elder brother during his life, and succeeded to his rank and lands at his death. To the name and race of Carnac she was very truly attached, and there were times when the present Lord exhibited very great tact in appealing judiciously to her feelings, and to that sort of affection which is engendered by habit, when she almost fancied that the new peer had inherited the loyalty which she had felt for his brother.

The truth would assert itself, however. The

old jealousy of the bright boy on whom all the world smiled, and whose undue brilliancy deepened the shadow that enwrapped poor Reginald from his cradle, came strongly to the surface. Lady Harriet had suffered a good many things on account of Lord Ulswater—quarrels with one of her oldest friends, petty slights that only a woman could feel, the unanswered eloquence of Mrs. Hastings when angry and cruel, the lowering of the abbey influence, the gossip of a watering-place. Ruth's death, and the fact that Ruth had insisted on seeing Lord Ulswater before she died, thus, in Lady Harriet's judgment, plainly pointing out the person responsible for her untimely end, filled the cup to overflowing.

The match between Lord Ulswater and Flora Hastings might in some sense be pronounced to be Lady Harriet's work, seeing that she had been her nephew's plenipotentiary to Shelton Manor, and had endured much to bring the negotiation to a happy climax. But now she looked forward to the wedding chiefly as the signal for her own departure from St. Pagans, which had been her home so long, and to which

she was attached with almost a feline adhesiveness. She meant to wash her hands of John her nephew, for whose benefit such opportune misfortunes seemed to fall on the heads of those who stood between him and the warm rays of prosperity. She did not exactly blame him because Reginald, his wife, and his infant son, had all died so conveniently out of the way of the brilliant cadet. But she did not feel the more cordially towards him because they had dropped out of his path, just as a mother might illogically dislike the maiden who should wear the jewels that she remembered on the neck and bosom of her dead daughter, however legitimately the ornaments might have changed owners. But for Ruth's death Lady Harriet did blame Lord Ulswater, and perhaps the more unswervingly because of the old grudges against him that she was loath to acknowledge. To do him justice, he had no intention of disturbing the ancient mistress of the abbey in her viceregal reign. "Flora and I don't want to turn you out, aunt," he had said laughing: "the house is too big for us. It would ruin us to live here. Petham will suit us fifty times

better, and we shall be in London a good deal, you know."

But Lady Harriet was inexorable. She would not be cajoled. Her determination to give up the keys, and resign her dignity of deputy-queen-regnant over St. Pagans was as firm, not to say obstinate, as ever was that of the most dogged minister who ever pressed his resignation on a reluctant monarch. Go she would; and whether her nephew chose to bring his bride to St. Pagans, or whether he would content himself with the modest comforts of Petham, which was a red brick mansion in the Vale of the White Horse, more fit, according to the standard which public opinion sets up, for a squire than for a peer of England, was nothing to her.

On the other hand, the affianced suitor of Miss Hastings could not but feel, now and then, that open enmity would have been pleasanter than the ostentatious forgiveness and forbearance of his future father-in-law and mother-in-law. The Right Honourable Robert was one of those men who are unfortunately disqualified, partly by nature, and partly by official habits, for anything like intercourse on equal terms. Such

persons resemble schoolmasters, who commonly alternate between awful oracular wisdom and awkward deference, according to their company. Mr. Hastings, in his intercourse with the great chiefs of his party and his clan, could be self-restraining and almost humble. He was as meek as any sucking-dove when he wore the Windsor uniform. There were a few dignitaries of state, Royal Highnesses, and leviathan Dukes, whom he treated as superior beings, but to the rest of the world he could hardly help exhibiting the dictatorial side of his character.

There was little satisfaction to be derived from such conversations as Lord Ulswater held with his intended father-in-law. The young peer had not proved as malleable in politics as the seniors of Shellton Manor had anticipated. He was moderate in his tone, and accessible to reason, but he showed no time-serving alacrity in abandoning his party. "It would hardly do for an English gentleman, I think, to give up the losing side just because of its ill success. *Victor Catoni*, you know, is a good sentiment, even if the quotation is a little hackneyed. If your people would give me the Bucharest

Legation, as you were good enough to say just now, I should perhaps accept it, but not as payment for my vote and interest." In these and similar words did Lord Ulswater receive and parry the gruff overtures of his father-in-law, and the more gracefully-put propositions of the female diplomatist of the family.

"Let him do as he likes," the testy minister would remark to his prudent wife. "I suppose the truth is, he would rather not rat just now that there's a rumour of Lord Tintagel's coming in on the hop-duty question. Hang his vote! That of any one of Morgan's borough members would have been twice as useful. The Commons govern the country."

Meanwhile, there were other sources of dissatisfaction. Flora's brother, the Secretary of Embassy, had come home from the uttermost parts of Europe on leave of absence, expressly, as it seemed, to make himself disagreeable. He was a heavy, flaccid, pompous young man, looking several years older than he was, with his prematurely bald temples and peevish mouth. The young attachés who served under him called him a prig, and his chief was privately of

opinion that the young attachés were right. But Cosmo Drummond Eliot Russell Hastings was a Porphyrogenite, born in the purple of officialism, even as his father had been, and he was very sure of promotion, G.C.B.ships, and other birthrights of the race from which he sprung.

Cosmo had come home in the worst possible temper. The heir of Shellton Manor was never very well supplied with ready money. All that his parents could leave was to be his. For his sake, the Right Honourable Robert had been at work for years, adding field to field, planting here, building there, scraping together dribblets of money and outlying scraps of land, and going through all the labour of what is called making an estate. But making an estate is an expensive process, and the allowance of the heir-apparent had never kept pace with his requirements. Cosmo was unmarried, waiting, most probably, till some rather plain she-cousin of suitable years, and belonging to one of the noble families with which he was allied by blood, and out of the pale of whose connection marriage would have been a wilful throwing away of influence,

should be found for him. A pretty cousin, as he knew, would be out of his reach, for there were plenty of kinsmen, born in the purple too, whose pretensions were loftier; but bachelors can be in debt as well as Benedicks, and Cosmo Hastings was in debt.

Cosmo was in debt, not over head and ears, as the phrase is, not deep sunk enough in the black waters of impecuniosity to be in immediate danger of drowning, but far enough in for discomfort. He owed a good deal to a good many people — lawyers, tradesmen, money-lenders, and even friends. He owed several hundred pounds, in particular, to William Morgan, who had been very open-handed in his dealings with the only brother of the girl he loved. It had so happened that when Mrs. Hastings was so extraordinarily lucky in netting the Cramlingham Cræsus for her daughter, young Hastings had been in London, hanging about the Foreign Office, in expectation of that appointment to H. B. M.'s Embassy (at the court of His Highness the Vladika of Montenegro), which he afterwards received. He belonged to clubs where men with cool heads

and mathematical minds, and men with hot heads and no minds worth speaking of, play whist for heavy stakes. Unluckily for himself, Cosmo belonged to the latter category. His heart was cold, but his head was hot with rash joy when he won, and rasher obstinacy when he lost. He did lose, more by about eleven hundred pounds, than he could pay; and debts of honour cannot be shelved like the claims of West-end tailors. Morgan lent Cosmo the eleven hundred pounds.

And now he must pay the money back; for shame's sake, he must do it, if it cost him the ruin of a fresh bond to back his bygone post-obits. Cosmo was mean of spirit, but he could not be mean enough to remain under obligation to the man whom his sister had jilted. On that very ground he was furious with his sister. He really seemed to think himself deeply injured, and that she had treated him basely in breaking off her engagement. There would have been no harm in owing a trifle, or many trifles, to a brother-in-law whose riches were so proverbial. Also, there was a man who had tried the army, and the militia, and the wine-trade, and

gentleman-farming, and who, having a stray thousand or two yet unspent, hankered after the post of land-steward to one of Morgan's estates, and had somehow diplomatically given Cosmo Hastings to understand, through the medium of a mutual friend, that a splendid *douceur* would reward his good offices in the candidate's behalf. That was out of the question now.

And Cosmo was at home, very sulky, walking out of a room as Lord Ulswater entered it, barely civil at best to his brother-in-law elect, and keeping up a sort of chronic quarrel with poor Flora, who was fond of him, as sisters commonly are fond of elder brothers. He did not scold her, but he preached lay-sermons on her fickleness; he complained of his own lot, and bewailed his loss of such a friend as Morgan, and snarled at her, and would not be appeased. No wonder that Miss Hastings was a little impatient to escape from a home that contained the elements of so much strife, and that the delays of the slow, steady lawyers, as they plodded through the settlements, appeared in a different point of view to her than when she had contentedly awaited the close of her old betrothal.

Lord Ulswater's life was not so very pleasant to him, after all. There were times when even Flora seemed a little afraid of him; times when a shadow darkened his brow, and his face was sad and stern, and his buoyant spirit had lost its elastic strength. He looked paler than before, and almost ill, and began to take a morbid pleasure in being alone — something quite foreign to the habits of popular John Carnac. His temper grew uncertain, too, and the servants saw a sullen something in his eye that boded no good, and they did their spiriting gently, and kept out of my Lord's way as men-of-war's men avoid the captain when he walks the quarter-deck frowningly. He grew fond of repairing to the extreme edge of the cliff, just beyond the ruins, where the path, seldom used, had been broken away by weather and time, and there were rifts and seams through which the white chalk gleamed, like underground snow.

Here he stood, then, on the day following that which saw the Sarks change their lodgings in Cecil Street for others of Brum's providing — stood on the giddy verge of the white

precipice, looking down. Nerves of steel were wanted for the task of standing on that spot, the threshold, as it were, between life and death, and gazing down so steadily and so long. There is a ghastly fascination in such a prospect. The depths below tempt and call the gazer; the waves that beat so far beneath take half-human shape of syren or mermaid, and wreath their white arms, and beckon and smile a treacherous invitation to a mortal lover; the smooth sand, the million-pebbled beach, the rocks fringed with green sea-grass and red wreck-weed, all find a tongue to cry: "Come to us." There is a weird fascination in thus meeting death face to face, that it is hard for any but the strong-brained to resist. The timid and the bold are alike conscious of the haunting wish to take the plunge—that one step onward.

Lord Ulswater's brain did not reel, and his heart beat no quicker, and he gazed and gazed, to all appearance as proof against rebellious nerves as the unimaginative coast-guardsman, on a peak a mile away, who was bending over the rocky parapet to satisfy himself that some dark weed-grown boulders were really rocks, and not

tubs or tobacco-bales. But he was conscious of the fatal beauty of the syrens, too, and heard their sweet, low song in the ripple of the tide. "One plunge," he said, "and I should be as wise as the wisest of the dead. The great secret lies within reach of a simple forward movement. All that men have hoped, and feared, and longed for, or shrunk from for ages untold, would be known to me, were I but to let my life drop, like a stone torn from the cliff-wall, into that shoal water frothing on the reef. Have I anything to hold me back? Not Flora; she can never know me as I am. I must wear my mask always, until the hour comes, and it is snatched away, and then she, too, will turn from me. I——"

"Beg pardon, my Lord—a letter!" said a respectful voice, and Lord Ulswater turned and met the eyes of one of his grooms, beside whom stood a lad in a smock-frock. It was the lad in the smock-frock who held the letter, an ugly, blotted epistle, between his dirty finger and his dirty thumb.

CHAPTER V.

NIXON'S HUT.

THE lad who held the letter between his thumb and finger, and whose light-blue eyes, round, prominent, and restless, were engaged in taking a stealthy survey of Lord Ulswater's personal appearance, was not a favourable specimen of the British peasant. He was no chubby, honest-faced youngster, with a wholesome pink skin, and a candid look, such as may be seen any day in agricultural England, and whom it is easy to imagine in the Roman slave-market, with a benevolent Pope pinching their ears as he utters the venerable pun: "Non Angli, sed Angeli;" for these round-faced, ruddy scions of the old English stock really do present no slight resemblance to the rosy cherubs whose heads, and wings, and plump torsoes we admire, as they

flutter, smilingly, on painted canvas and frescoed ceiling.

The messenger in question differed from these as a gaunt Irish pig, limbed like a greyhound and fanged like a wolf, differs from the indolent porker, small-boned and obese, that wins gold medals at Islington. A lank, rawboned stripling was he as he stood there in his ragged smock-frock; a white felt hat, low-crowned, and with a narrow brim turning upwards, resting on his head. It was just such a hat as the comic countryman wears upon the stage; but it was old and damaged, and had a streak of blood and matted hare's fur upon it, that no keeper could have seen without emotion. From under the upturned brim of this hat there fell a quantity of neglected hair, of a white flaxen tint, that matched perfectly with the freckled face, the high cheek-bones, and the protuberant blue eyes of this rustic Ganymede. Lord Ulswater looked to his servant for an explanation.

"Sorry if I've done wrong, my Lord, I'm sure," said the groom. "This boy came a quarter of an hour ago with a letter he said he was told not to give into no one's hands except

your Lordship's own. He stood me out it was on business of consequence, and so I made so bold to bring him out to you, my Lord. They're a bad lot, them Nixons, in a general way, and I knowed him for a Nixon directly he put his ugly face inside the stable-yard," continued the groom, who was a local groom, born and bred in the district, and who knew its inhabitants pretty well by sight and by repute.

"You did right, Masters," said Lord Ulswater. "I think the boy must be a Nixon, as you say. Is that your name, my lad?" he added.

"My name be Kit Nixon," said the youth, sheepish and yet saucy. "I ben't ashamed of it, and so I tell *you*, Tom Masters. We're as good as you, we Nixons. We're all there, we are, whatever you may say; and if my dad and Uncle Simon warn't in trouble, you dursn't——"

"Hold your tongue, my young friend," said Lord Ulswater, rather amused than displeased by the boy's petulance. "Who wrote that letter?"

"I dunnow," replied the stripling, suddenly

divesting his freckled face of every sign of intelligence, and confronting the inquirer with absolute stolidity; "I dunnow he."

"Do you know, you limb, you're a-talking to my Lord, and he be a justice o' the peace, too?" cried the groom, quite scandalised, and then touched his hat again, and "begged pardon, my Lord."

"I know," said the boy, turning savagely on his monitor—"I know, Tom Masters, for all your fine livery, and your boots and spurs, Uncle Simon drashed ye, like a sack o' wheat, he did, at Lushington Fair; and I'll drash ye too, for a sovereign a side, when I'm a year or two older."

The noble owner of St. Pagans laughed gently. This little by-play of comedy was a relief to his gloomy thoughts. He motioned to the groom to be silent, and took the letter from the boy, who resigned it unwillingly.

"You be the gentleman sure?" said Kit Nixon.

Lord Ulswater opened the letter, and almost as soon as his eyes lit upon the writing, a great change came over him, and his face blanched as

if the Gorgon's glare were turning his flesh to marble. "Saddle a horse," he said, hastily : "the gray, *Firefly*, will do for to-day. Bring the horse round to me here ; and make no fuss about this, Masters, either in the stables or in the servants' hall ; you understand ?" And Lord Ulswater looked fixedly in the man's face.

Masters the groom looked as intelligent as he could. "Yes, my Lord," was all he said, but he had an air of great importance as he ran round to the yard. "Take off gray *Firefly's* clothing, will ye, you, Simcox," he cried to a helper. "Just give him a rub down while I get the saddle and bridle from the harness-room, and turn him round in the stall, and unbuckle them coupling-reins, and get the halter off. Look sharp !"

"My Lord's in a hurry seemingly," said Simcox as the girths were drawn.

"What's that to you ? Don't you go jawing about it, I advise you, my man," snapped Masters in reply.

It was not the best way of obeying his Lord's injunction certainly, but he had gray *Firefly* saddled in the twinkling of an eye, and brought

him round to the cliff-path, where Lord Ulswater stood, with the letter crumpled in his hand.

"You must show me the way; I shall not ride fast," said Lord Ulswater as he mounted.

Kit Nixon, who was the person addressed, nodded and grinned. "All right, governor," said this irreverent young person, to whom social decorum was as nothing; and as the rider headed his horse towards the spreading downs, this strange foot-page ambled beside his rein, sending back a gesture of defiance by way of farewell to Masters.

"Darned young gallowsbird; he'll come to no good!" muttered the groom, gazing after him.

Firefly was a sixteen-hands high horse, and a fast walker; but Kit Nixon, at a shambling, jerky pace, kept well up with him all across the elastic turf, that spread for a mile or so, unbroken, over the downs, running inland. Presently, a gate appeared, guarding the entrance of a narrow lane, and henceforth the way lay between hedgerows, past small woods, and among lonely hills, the sides of which bore a short herbage, nibbled by little flocks of sheep. Only once or twice was a carter, trudging beside his team of two sturdy farm-nags, harnessed

tandem-fashion, and drawing a load of quicklime from the kiln, passed upon the solitary road. But rough and uneven as was the track, the guide showed no sign of distress. "Trot if ye like!" he said once as he jerked along; and as Lord Ulswater did not press his horse into a faster pace, Kit Nixon merely gave a shrill whistle, to prove that he had breath to spare, and hurled a stone now and again at the rabbits that sat sunning themselves at the entrance of their burrows.

"We live on Clackey Common," Mr. Christopher Nixon had said; and as Clackley, corrupted into Clackey in local parlance, was one of those out-of-the-way nooks which exist in every district, and which few but the compilers of Ordnance Maps have ever heard of, the lad's guidance among the lanes was not a work of surplusage. As Lord Ulswater rode quietly along, with that ill-written letter in his breast-pocket, he found that his thoughts, vagrant as it is in the nature of thoughts to be, strayed to the probable future of the impudent young fellow running beside his stirrup.

As Professor Owen builds up a Dinornis out

of a few dry bones of the dead-and-gone wingless bird, so had Lord Ulswater the power to construct a tolerably correct mental picture of Kit Nixon from the data before him. He could see the family—there are such everywhere—under a ceaseless stigma, shunned, suspected, getting a livelihood, as Esau got one, by the strong hand. All countries contain such civilised savages, plying a dubious industry on the borders of society, snatching and snarling for crumbs like the wild dogs at the gate of Dives. He had some recollection of a Nixon sentenced to penal servitude for horse-stealing, and of another hanged (but that was in John Carnac's nursery-days, and he had heard the servants prattle of the thing) for stealing sheep.

What would become of this creature, whose most innocent employment was to help in netting a covey of partridges, who only worked once a year at hop-picking, and whose father and uncle were in jail for the twentieth time perhaps? Would he take the shilling from Sergeant Kite, and be moulded into a smart soldier? That was one chance, and emigration was another ; but

beyond that there lay a vista of nothing but bridewells and model prisons, with perhaps a halter at the end.

Wondering at himself for thinking on these topics, Lord Ulswater did think of them, eyeing the ugly lad in the ragged smock-frock with something that was not far removed from genuine pity. John Carnac had never been a philanthropist, save in the sense that every man of intelligence and education, and who is but moderately selfish, is one. He would have preferred that vice and crime, and want and ignorance, and all the brood of sin and suffering, should become extinct. He knew that the world would be a much more comfortable place of abode if every fellow-creature in it were sober, and good, and honest, taught and washed, lodged and fed, in accordance with the maxims of health and morality. He had rather have seen a happy smiling world of good-will and mutual kindness, than the fierce elbowing and trampling down of the weak and the stupid, which goes on throughout the eddies, and ebbs, and flows of the battle of life. But not if he were to pay for it; not if he were to lose one private

advantage or enjoyment incompatible with the general good. Sooner than that, he could look with serene indifference upon the strife and sorrow of the masses blundering blindly on upon their devious path.

But it is easier to hear with equanimity of armies mown down and cities blazing at the convenient distance of some hundred leagues or more, than to bear the sight of a single corpse lying by the road-side, or of one cottage in flames. Kit Nixon, as a member of the dangerous classes, was no more interesting than is any unknown unit of the slain upon a far-off field of combat. It was good to learn from blue-books that there were supposed, on the strength of authentic returns, to be so many thousands and hundreds of them, showing a diminution or increase of so many per cent. since a previous year, and to hope that the tribe might one day become a thing of the past, improved out of the country. But here was Kit, no impersonal fraction of an arithmetical average, but a live human being, capable of feeling joy and woe, pain and pleasure, and with as much at stake in the great problems of

existence as if he had been H. R. H. Prince Christopher, and no mere rustic thief.

Lord Ulswater made more than one effort to draw the youth out, to induce him to talk freely, but all his skill failed. The boy looked cunningly up at him, and then ensconced himself behind that shield of impenetrable stolidity that a modern Corydon, in no matter what part of Europe, can always oppose to questioning. A country lad is not less suspicious of the intentions of other people than is the sharper town-reared boy—perhaps more so; and in Kit's case, the unwillingness to be communicative was stronger than with plain ploughboys who come of unfelonious families. The world was not Kit's friend; and the world's law was to him as the abomination of desolation. Talk confidentially to a fine gentleman, who was one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace, and who owned land and preserved game—the thing was absurd! A Highland cateran might as well have been expected to boast of his exploits to the sheriff of Selkirkshire, or Brum to exchange numismatic confidences with the Master of the Mint. Young Nixon proved to resemble Canning's

knife-grinder; he had no story to tell, or else he would not tell it.

"This be Clackey Common!" remarked the lad, swinging open a gate that opened from the end of the last lane upon a wide open waste, too wet to be easily reclaimed by any draining-works for which the peaty soil would ever return an equivalent, and which was rushy and reedy, and heathy and broom-tufted, and full of black shallow pools, over which the water-hen flew like a dusky ball of feathers towards her flat nest among the sedges. "This be Clackey Common! Nice place, ben't it?" added the stripling, grinning with native impudence as he saw the expression of disgust that crossed Lord Ulswater's face on catching sight of this aguish wilderness. As Kit spoke, he winced away from the horse's side, as if expecting a blow in return for his effrontery; but something kindly in Lord Ulswater's grave, handsome face, encouraged him to venture back within reach.

"You be a gentleman!" he said critically, and with the air of an authority on such subjects; "not like Farmer Titterton down to Splashley there, the stuck-up Jackadandy—they calls un

Squire Titterton ; but I knows better, for all he wears a red coat out with fox-hounds—he licked me with his gig-whip ; you may see the cut across my face here yet, just because I hallooed after him, Stowe market-day.—You must mind how you ride here. Keep behind me. It's as wet as can be."

And, indeed, Lord Ulswater found that his horse's feet sunk into the soft miry earth at every step, unless he kept strictly to the narrow path, full of stones, up which his young guide pushed at a brisk pace.

The path lay uphill after a time, and presently the many-coloured roof of a queer, untidy edifice, low and long, became visible. "Yon be our house. Nixon's Hut they call it," said the boy, half proudly, half with shy surliness. "Father built it, when the tell-tale sneak of a bailiff got him turned out of his cottage up to Tinling Street, five mile away.—I say," added young Kit, sidling up to pat the neck of the gray horse, "if you're going to give I something to drink your health, let us have it afore we get there, else Brother Roger 'll grab it.—Whoop ! hurra !" cried the young savage a moment later,

as he made haste to conceal the two half-crowns which Lord Ulswater tossed to him; and with glistening eyes and elated spirits he went running actively on in front.

Nixon's Hut soon became more distinctly apparent, with its turfen walls and low-pitched roof, half of turf and half of thatch, overgrown with moss and house-leek, and every parasitic plant that can cling to rotting straw. There were but two windows, very small, and glazed with green bull's-eye glass, but the door stood open. Christopher ran in, and soon ran out again. "Brother Roger's dead drunk," he said cheerfully; "and mother and the children be out, a-gleaning or something. But the cove's in—he what wrote—and here he comes."

And in very truth, shading his eyes with his hand as if the daylight dazzled him, forth from the hut came, approaching Lord Ulswater in the doubtful fawning way in which a dog in disgrace approaches his master, the sturdy figure of Bendigo Bill.

CHAPTER VI.

CONFESSION.

BENDIGO BILL came cringing out, with quite a new sort of awkwardness in his gait and air, as he approached his patron. So might some gross, ignoble demon humbly draw near to do homage at the steps of the burning throne of Milton's arch-fiend. "I—I meant to do for the best, my Lord;" he growled these words rather than spoke them; and then the frown that he saw more in Lord Ulswater's eyes than on that broad white brow that it was so hard to ruffle, froze him into silence. Lord Ulswater wheeled gray *Firefly* round: "Follow!" he said, in the deepest tone of his deep voice; and then, with the ex-bushranger trudging meekly at the heels of his horse, he rode to the highest part of the hilly ground, just outside the boundary

of the Nixon domain. Here he drew rein, and waited for Bendigo Bill to come up to his side.

The place was one fairly well suited for a private conversation. There was a broad space from which the broom and heather had been cleared away, and where not a bush remained to shelter eavesdroppers. On three sides stretched the drear expanse of Clackley Moor or Common, and on the fourth lay the two fields and the patch of garden-ground that the squatter had fenced in, unproved, when first he built his wigwam in that wild corner of the earth. Clackley was either no common except by name, or it was a common whereof the commoners had lost their rights by disuse, probably the latter, for the district is one of those south of England tracts of country whereof the population lessens every decade in favour of northern hives of industry. Not so much as a flock of geese or a stray donkey cropped the little grass that straggled here and there among weeds and reeds. The manor was in Chancery, and the receiver of that high court contented himself with drawing rents from solvent tenants. The

Nixons were in a fair way to gain a freehold by sheer lapse of time.

But it was not a thriving freehold. The garden was as the garden of the sluggard, choked with rank growth of groundsel and nettles, and there were more poppies, and docks, and wild vetches among the spare oats and the few potatoes than good husbandry allows. It was bad, wet land, and it was lazily tilled, more as an ostensible means of living than a real one. The only cheerful thing about the enclosure was the gorse hedge, gay with gold bloom, that ran round the lower part of it. A place of bad repute with the county police was Nixon's Hut: not a constable in the shire would have cared to visit it alone.

"How came you here?" asked Lord Ulswater sternly, of Bendigo Bill.

"I knowed the Nixons long ago, so please you, my Lord," said the man meekly; "I've been a pal of Long Nixon, that took to the bush, in Australia, and was shot——"

"So you came here for shelter, after the—what shall I call it—the little affair of the other day?" interrupted his patron, with a sneer that

distorted his handsome mouth into an expression that was absolutely fiendish.

"Yes, my Lord!" was the downcast answer, and Bendigo Bill's eyes sought the ground.

"You have done wrong," said Lord Ulswater severely; "you have gone beyond your instructions, and have brought that bull-neck of yours within the compass of a halter. I ordered you to watch the man, not to mur——"

"Stop, my Lord; don't say it," hastily implored Bendigo Bill, interrupting his patron for perhaps the first time since their acquaintance had begun. "I thought to please you by—by——" He passed the sleeve of his fustian coat once or twice across his dry lips, and took a long breath, and then looked down again, evidently waiting for his employer to speak. But he waited in vain. Not a sound reached his ears but the jingling of gray *Firefly's* bridle as the horse tossed his head, impatient to be gone, and the pawing of gray *Firefly's* iron-shod forefoot upon the peaty soil, and the surly hum of a laden bee winging its way home.

Two minutes—three—five! How slowly and painfully they went. The ex-bushranger bore

them as he would have borne the rack, with obstinate endurance at first, then with a smothered execration, and at last with an actual groan. He looked up. The rattling of the curb-chain had ceased, and horse and rider, motionless, towered above him like an equestrian statue. There was something irritating, and at the same time awe-inspiring, in that stern repose. The horseman's features, noble and calm, and very pale, paler by far than Bendigo Bill remembered to have seen them, were as inflexible as iron now. The blue eyes were cold and steady as the eyes of a stone saint on a Gothic tomb—not a muscle moved. Lord Ulswater, deep in his dark thoughtfulness, was as still and impassive as if he had been entranced or spell-bound.

"My Lord!" broke out Bendigo Bill, in sheer desperation. He advanced a step, and laid his hand, hesitatingly, on the gray horse's silken mane—"my Lord!"

Lord Ulswater started like one suddenly aroused from sleep, and in a moment he shook off the imperious thoughts that beset him, and was the same cool, courageous gentleman that

his ruffianly acolyte had ever known him. "I repeat it; you have done wrong," he said, fixing his piercing gaze on Bendigo Bill; "but spilled blood, like spilled milk, cannot be atoned for by empty words. I don't ask you why you did it; but I do tell you that you have brought yourself to the very edge of the drop at Debtors' Door of Newgate Jail, and that you have so bungled the business as to implicate *me* as an accessory after the fact, to use the technical phrase. How dared you send that young ragamuffin to St. Pagans? Do you not know that your scrawl of a letter ran every risk of being fingered and peeped at in the servants' hall before it reached the hands it was meant for? And do you suppose that *I* should pardon you the disgrace of a public trial, into which I should be dragged by your blundering act?"

Bendigo Bill gave a growl like that of a faithful dog unjustly blamed. "You know I'd not split; you know I'd swing first!" he said, reproach in his eyes and tone, looking up at the hard, handsome face of his master.

"I know this," answered Lord Ulswater with an accent of such perfect conviction that it chilled the stout heart of the man who heard it:

“you are certain to give a holiday to the London mob. I hear the hammers, even now, of the workmen putting up the scaffold, and the hoarse roar of the great crowd that blocks the streets around the grim prison-walls in the gray of early morning. I hear the bell of St. Sepulchre’s toll for the death of a man alive as yet, strong, healthy, likely to last these forty years, if it were not that all the thousands of sightseers below had come expressly to see him strangled to death before their eyes. And I see you, William Huller, led out, with pinioned arms, upon the drop, and you shudder as you feel the hangman’s fingers fumbling with the cold cord around your neck, and you do not look as bold as when my Lord Judge put on the black cap, and you heard your sentence, and boasted you would die game. One look down at the street that seems paved with faces looking up at you, all at you, and then they draw the white cap over your eyes——”

“Be quiet, curse you!” exclaimed Bendigo Bill in irrepressible mental anguish, as the heat-drops beaded fast upon his forehead. “I can’t bear that. Are you a man, I wonder, or the

devil himself?" This ruffian was not more imaginative than are most of his class. He lived in the present, and gave little heed to the future. Had he been actually left for execution, he would very probably have eaten a hearty supper, and slept a refreshing sleep on the eve of his doomday, and then gone out like an ox to the shambles, staring, half-stupid, and half-ferocious, at the preparations for thrusting him out of this world. But Lord Ulswater's words, very slowly and forcibly uttered, very carefully chosen, had sunk into his ears like drops of molten lead, giving pain most exquisite, and tracing a ghastly picture, that was perhaps more dreadful to the ex-bushranger than the reality would have been.

Lord Ulswater watched the working of his untutored friend's scarred and weather-beaten face with a good deal of amusement. He waited quite contentedly till the man's mood should change. Presently, Bendigo Bill began to shuffle awkwardly with his heavy feet, and to cast sidelong glances at his patron. "I beg your Lordship's pardon," he said sheepishly.

Lord Ulswater reined his horse round, and

rose in his stirrups to look over the hedge and wall of loose stones. No untoward listener was near. "I can save you from this—I alone," he said impressively, and Bendigo Bill looked uneasy still, but some hope began to glimmer in his eyes.

"I never killed a white man before—not a white man," repeated he with great emphasis on the qualification — "except in a stand-up fight. And I wouldn't have hurt him, not beyond choking of him down, and leaving him to come to by degrees, if he hadn't turned and faced me, and known me as I laid hold." And then it all came out, given with savage force and minuteness of detail, the story of the crime. How Bendigo Bill, eager to gain possession of the documents which he had heard Mr. Marsh mention in his first interview with Loys, had gone early to lie in ambush among the piles of timber by the river-side, meaning to put his garrotter's craft in requisition for the purpose of depriving the surgeon of these papers, the importance of which he probably much exaggerated. He had armed himself with a murderous weapon, but he protested, with all the energy of a self-

·deceiver, that he did not mean to use the steel crowbar, except in defending himself if in peril of capture. But Mr. Marsh had not proved an unresisting victim. He had turned on Bendigo Bill, had known him at once, and had called him by his name. "I hit him then," Bill confessed—"I hit him with the ripping-chisel, and he closed with me, and we had a goodish tussle; but I got the best of it, and, to stop his hallooing out for help, I—I—but he died hard, sir." And the ruffian shewed a half-healed scar upon his own cheek, close to the upper lip. "He got the crow from me one-twentieth part of a minute, and I wrested it back again," he explained.

The other details of the homicide were few and brief. He had searched the pockets, had taken the papers that he sought, and had possessed himself of the dead man's watch, in order, if possible, to throw the police on a false scent. But some noise had alarmed him, and he had made haste to throw the body into the river, and had seen it swept away and sucked down by the current. He had then made his escape, had washed away, at the foot of a stone stair

leading down to a landing-stage, such stains from the recent deed as were on his hands and clothes, and had tied up his bleeding face in his red handkerchief. Then he had proceeded to the railway terminus, hoping to catch the late mail-train, and to reach Shellton during the dark hours.

But at the terminus Mr. William Huller's evil genius had led him into the presence of a detective officer, who was waiting there, cunningly disguised, to start on professional business by that very train to another town lying on a fork or branch of the Shellton line. This officer, who knew Bendigo Bill perfectly well, had also seen at a glance that the man was agitated and restless, and that there were good grounds for crediting him with some recent mischief. But even detectives are but men, and it was not likely that the sergeant should run the chance of losing a large reward merely that he might escort Bendigo Bill, as a reputed thief, to the nearest police-station.

"Mind you, though, Bill, my man," the officer had said, with lifted forefinger wagging minatory before the ex-convict's eyes, "if there's

any special job gets known of to-night in town, I shall take the liberty of asking a few more questions about how you've spent your time. That's all."

Bendigo Bill, crestfallen, slunk out of the station. Travel with Sergeant Sharpe, after that warning, and perhaps be locked up on suspicion in some country prison, as a rogue and vagabond well known to the police, until the murder should be town talk! Run the risk of being stored away in the larder of justice, as it were, like some dainty that would be the better for the keeping! The man would as soon have gone knowingly into a lion's den. He had not taken his ticket for Shellton, nor had he let slip the name of the place whither he was bound. There was some comfort in that. He might walk the distance. The enemy would be less likely to pursue him thus, along the old high road. He lost no time in putting this project into execution. Before the pale dawn broke he was miles from London, setting his face resolutely sea-ward, and tramping sturdily on along the dusty common way.

He showed at this pinch some of the instinc

tive cunning of the lower animals. His point was St. Pagans or its neighbourhood, as that of a hunted fox is the well-known earth, far off on some gorse-topped hill, where the fir-spinny stands out blackly against the pearl-gray winter sky. But as the fox doubles and twists, and tries all the resources of his sylvan skill to give the hounds the slip, so did Bendigo Bill strive hard to blind the trail. Turning off the main road, he either slept away the hot day in taps of village inns, or plodded along the loneliest lanes, taking short cuts over field and common, and only returned to the highway when night was come to screen and befriend him. Always, however, he was steadfast to his purpose. Lord Ulswater was his patron and employer; Lord Ulswater could, and doubtless would, get him off scot free. His great aim was to reach St. Pagans before he should be arrested and cut off from communicating with his master.

The body must have been found long since, he told himself, as he made his devious way towards the coast. Before he reached the end of his journey, he knew that his conjecture had been proved a true one. It was in a noisy

public-house in a market town on the day of a horse fair that he read the account of how and where the corpse had been discovered. He read the paragraph in the column of accidents and offences of the county paper, yet wet from the press, on that, the day of its publication. The country editor had extracted that paragraph from the London journals at the last moment, and when the *Flying Horse* received its copy of the local gazette, the barman gave the first offer of its perusal to the stout-built navvy, tramping from London in search of work, because he was sober in the midst of a crowd of drunken, bawling horse-chanters; and thus Bendigo Bill came to read the printed announcement of his own crime.

He was poring over it still, with a dull, fearful curiosity, when he felt a touch upon his arm, and looking up, recognised a face that he had not seen for many a day—the face of Kit Nixon's big brother, a strapping young man in velveteen, with a cartwhip in his hand.

"Why, Bill Huller," said the big brother of Kit Nixon. "What's up now?"

Bendigo Bill knew this Nixon right well, and

all the Nixons, save young Kit and the juveniles of the family. He had robbed orchards and hen-roosts in company with Simon, this lad's uncle, now in jail; and had been a comrade of another of the tribe, Long Nixon the bushranger, shot, after the manner of bushrangers, by a trooper of the Australian mounted police. The Nixon in velveteen was of a younger generation; but he, too, had co-operated with Bendigo Bill in the matter of hocussing a hop-grower fresh from the Borough Market, with his canvas bag of sovereigns in his pocket. The two associates in this bygone enterprise met in friendly fashion.

Then it was that Bendigo Bill first bethought him of Nixon's Hut, and how he might lie snugly there concealed, instead of venturing into Shellton. The lawless family dwelling on Clackley Common would not, he knew, betray him. Enmity to all constables, sessions, assizes, and legal persons and paraphernalia was a tradition with them, and almost a passion. Very likely, as Sir Robert Walpole declared every man, politically speaking, to have his price, the Nixons might have theirs; but it would need a

large reward to induce a member of the household to give up an old pal, and stand in the box as a crown witness.

The scheme was soon broached ; but Bendigo Bill was careful to drop no hint of anything worse than robbery with violence as the cause of his desire to "keep dark" for a while. The Nixons were not very scrupulous, but they might have felt some repugnance to wilful assassination. Policemen and gamekeepers were, no doubt, natural enemies of the human race, to exterminate whom was excusable, if not meritorious ; but the cold-blooded killing of a person not belonging to these objectionable classes would have probably shocked them not a little. As a garrotter in difficulties, yet with sufficient cash to stand treat liberally, the fugitive was more than welcome. He had been for two or three days a guest at Nixon's Hut, and his spirits were beginning to flag by day, and his sleep by night to be troubled with grisly dreams.

"Do help me to get out o' this, my Lord," the fellow pleaded, as he concluded his tale ; and as he spoke, he produced the papers taken from the person of the unfortunate Shellton

doctor; "do give me a lift, or I shall get the horrors. I've seen chaps so, that had something on their minds, at the diggings."

Lord Ulswater took the papers: he looked them over, almost carelessly, and placed them in his pocket. "Worth having, but not at such a price!" he said with his cold smile. Then he smiled again, more cordially, and his voice was more gentle than before, as he said: "I will give you a lift, as you call it, Bill—a lift that will set you on your feet again, free from all apprehensions of a near acquaintance with Mr. Calcraft. Your talents have not scope, it seems, in this old-fashioned country: California, now, with three or four hundred pounds to start you in life——"

"The very thing, my lord!" cried the man, brightening up at once. "If your lordship only would."

"And I will. But you have a service to render me first," said Lord Ulswater. "Do not trouble yourself to speak. I see by your face that you would do much to begin life afresh in an untried country. I cannot tell you yet what is the service that I require. Keep still, and

keep sober. In a day or two, or three, you shall see me here again ; and I promise you that within a week or two, you shall be at sea, clear of England.—Enough ! you must have patience !” And shaking off the ruffian’s grasp from his bridle, Lord Ulswater turned his horse and rode leisurely back to St. Pagans.

CHAPTER VII.

AMONG THE MARKET-GARDENS.

"JUSTICE must be done—ought to be done. There will be no blessing upon us or ours, Jem, dear, unless we help that poor child to get his own inheritance," exclaimed Loys, with passionate earnestness.

"I say so too," rejoined her husband; and old Brum nodding assent, the motion may be said to have been put to the vote and carried unanimously. It was, in fact, something like a council of war that was being held by this trio.

The house in which the council of war was held was such a house, and in such a situation, as only a suburban district to the east of London could have paralleled. The dwelling itself was cottage-shaped, but it was neither of stone nor brick : it was of wood, and of second-hand wood

also, for it appeared as if no portion of the materials had not done service before. Part of this extraordinary cottage consisted of the sternmost half of an old barge, sawn in two, and a moiety set up endways in the earth, and propped by great tarry pieces of timber, on which snails, which were Legion thereabouts, had left their glistening track. The half-barge was yellow; but the rest of the walls had been composed of stray pine-planks, old doors painted green or blue, boards rough as when they left the saw-mill, but dark with exposure to weather, odds and ends from carpenters' yards and wharfs, nailed together with some ingenuity, but no heed to symmetry. The cottage was of no particular order of architecture, and even in shape it was irregular, bulging out in unexpected places, and having a number of small windows like those of a sea-going vessel's cabin. The roof was flat, and was boarded, the boards being protected by tarpaulins nailed over them, on which latter there rested a multitude of flower-pots, above which towered the battered figure-head of a ship, Britannia, trident in hand.

A queer habitation, with its walls patched

indifferently with old wood of all colours or of none—green, blue, black, yellow, or staring red, with creeping plants crawling all over it, and a heavy wooden porch in the Dutch taste, and adorned by several grotesque little painted figures, chipped and broken now, such as may be seen any day by the myriad along the borders of a Dutch canal.

“Old Vanpeerenboom, the Dutch market-gardener that built this crib,” the Professor had remarked—“I knew him well, and many a pipe I smoked with him under that porch of a summer’s evening. He was a bachelor, and lived all alone. His sister was in London, though, married to a sugar-baker’s foreman; and it’s the nephew, a publican, the garden belongs to now. I know the publican too. The garden’s rented off, but I’ve had leave to use the house when I like. I got the key to-day, and got in a bit more furniture on hire from a broker’s in the Woolwich Road. The house is in good repair. Nobody’s cared to live in it since the old man’s time. He used for to say it reminded him of Holland, the view of the premises, he did.”

There was really some truth in the defunct Dutchman's remark. He had thought fit to erect his Bachelors' Hall in the middle of a large garden, one of a congeries of gardens, large and small, but all highly cultivated, on the strictest principles of pure utilitarianism, for the supply of London, lying hard by, and hungering for fruit and vegetables. There were no bright gravel-walks in these gardens, no shrubberies or trim lawns inviting to croquet, no fountains, no trees murmuring softly in the summer wind, no clumps of gorgeous azaleas and rhododendrons—nothing but moist black earth, unctuous and fertile, whence sprang up greens by the wagon-load, and radishes by the ton, and strawberries enough to fill millions of pottles in the season of strawberries, and all other home-grown produce that Covent Garden demands. Trenches and ridges where asparagus grew, melon-frames and bell-glasses like great vitreous mushrooms strewed thickly over the ground, acres of gooseberry-bushes, cucumbers under glass, and scarlet-runners twining high upon their trellis-work of poles, as if emulous of the fairy beanstalk up which Jack clomb to fortune. But not a square

inch of lawn, no blossom beyond a score or two of tall brazen-faced sunflowers ; nothing for show—all for use.

These gardens were divided from one another, here by a tiny canal, there by a low brick wall, well defended by broken glass, and in a third instance by wooden palings, garnished with a triple row of cruel-looking tenter-hooks, over which the most famished of street Arabs would hardly have ventured. They contained countless arbours, generally made of an old boat set on end, but sometimes merely consisting of a few spare laths or bits of half-rotten timber, draped all over with honeysuckle or French beans. There were also sheds innumerable, some for tools, and some for seeds, and others for the habitation of domestic animals—rabbits, pigs, and poultry ; profitably maintained on the refuse of the greenery and roots, the best of which were daily carted off to satiate the perennial appetite of craving London.

Beyond, over a vista of low-lying marshy fields, and broad ditches, and windmills, lay the Thames, with all its masts rising gaunt through the haze of river-vapour, and the smoke of the

many below-bridge steamers, ceaselessly puffing and splashing their busy way up and down the muddy stream. On a mellow autumn evening, when the sun was going down, brick red or tawny orange, in the stained western sky, and when the high lands lying to the north were hidden by fog-wreaths clinging heavily to the foot of the hills, the late Mynheer Vanpeerenboom might, without any great stretch of imagination, have fancied, as he inhaled the fumes of his tobacco, that the landscape on which he gazed belonged to some peculiarly ugly province of his native Netherlands.

But for purposes of concealment the place was well chosen. Very few, save market-gardeners, ever left the marks of their feet in the soft earth of the ill-kept lane, and market-gardeners are an incurious race, wrapped up in considerations of weather and prices.

Within, the house was more comfortable than could have been surmised from an inspection of its exterior. Most of the rooms had been panelled with well-seasoned wood, cut into curious shapes, such as suited the cabins of the ships in which it had no doubt been buffeted by the waves of all the

seas on the map of the world. In the principal room or parlour was a ship's stove. There was some old-fashioned furniture of small value, in addition to that which Brum had hired; and as the original proprietor had possessed a share of the Dutch passion for cleanliness, the planks of the floors and stairs, and the bricks of the kitchen pavement, were even yet in tolerable condition.

"She's a rare one to draw, I can tell you," the Professor had said, pointing to the stove in the parlour, and which had probably comforted the chilled limbs of some Amsterdam skipper, in many a wintry voyage among the sleet-storms of the North Sea—"a rare one to draw. But the place, though pleasant in summer, is just a bit damp, you know, for nine months of the year. Nobody, not Dutch, could stand it." And as crops of variegated fungi clung in unwholesome profusion to water-butt, and porch, and wall—as there was duck-weed on the little canal that served to irrigate the garden in dry weather—and the very sty (ingeniously built of boards from Canton tea-chests) that had once held Mynheer's porkers was dropping to pieces

from the effects of mildew, the Professor's observation was evidently within the limits of truth.

But Sark had a sailor's handy knack for adjusting and contriving; and his wife being gifted with the quick perceptions and neat-handed industry which women are rarely without, the furniture was speedily arranged in orderly fashion, and the old place began to look neater than ever it could have done in the days of its founder. Brum was indefatigable. He ran errands assiduously, was ready to fetch and carry like a retriever, and did his best to ingratiate himself with his guests. He showed great skill in discovering impromptu charwomen, bringing in, now a deaf old female, warranted to scrub and scour as long as the tea and gin, which seemed the staff of life to her, were forthcoming; now a little girl, capable of sweeping floors and peeling potatoes, and whose parents were glad that she should earn a sixpence by a morning's enlistment under Mrs. Sark's orders.

"A regular servant," old Brum remarked, shaking his sagacious head, like an aged rat

dilating on the dangers of traps and poison—"a regular servant would never do : sure to get talking. Bless you ! I'm up to these games, I am. There's nobody keeps a regular servant this side of the *Lord Rodney* public ; not till you get to the marine store beyond the canal, they don't. People would fancy 'twas the Emperor of Rooshia in disguise, if I was to ask for one—they would, about here."

And this appeared possible, since the market-gardeners by no means followed the example of the philosophical Vanpeerenboom in dwelling among their cabbages. They usually lived at some distance, on drier ground, and contented themselves with employing one or two private watchmen to supplement the vigilance of the police.

Brum, like most men, was partly, and but partly disinterested in his good offices. He really, in spite of his partial betrayal of their intentions on that night on which Lord Ulswater had visited him under the guidance of Mr. Moss, had a strong liking for the Sarks, husband and wife, and a genuine gratitude for their goodness to him when he lay, ill of a fever, and poor, on

a sick-bed in Australia. But if he liked them much, he liked himself, as was but natural, even better. His first offer of a hiding-place had been very much prompted by the wish to get the plate for the manufacture of forged Russian rouble-notes executed in the superior style for which Dandy Jem had once been famous. But Dandy Jem, partly because he was weary of lawless living, and partly to please his wife, had not proved malleable on this subject. In vain had the Professor laid the smooth slab of burnished steel, the white wax, the long-stoppered acid bottles, the array of sharp graving-tools, and the specimen of genuine paper-money, on the same table which supported the little model on which Sark worked so hopefully ; the tempter tempted in vain.

Presently, however, old Brum, whose age was not exempt from caprice, as indeed the age of a Methuselah would scarcely be, took fire with a wholly novel notion. The Sarks made no secret of their intention to emigrate to America, where the clever Manxman's talents, eminently marketable, would be likely to meet with a substantial reward for their exercise, and still

more so if he could carry with him a sum of money to set him up in some small way of business. Why, thought the veteran Professor, should he not go to America too, keep near his young friends, and share the good luck of which they were so confident? He had a tiny hoard of money, enough to pay his way in America for three months or so. He should not prove a drone in the hive. His ingenuity, in some branches of manual art, was undoubted. True, what he did best was to coin spurious shillings and sovereigns, and this industry, if Jem were really resolute to be on the square henceforth, must be given up. But as a watchmaker or as a locksmith, as a working jeweller or a working cutler, he knew very well that he was no mean proficient. He could be of use in Jem's future factory, if Jem would agree to take him on.

Sark and Loys Sark were willing that this aged law-breaker, in the sere and yellow leaf of his days, should follow them to the far-off country, gilded by the tints of Hope. There was something almost touching, to Loys Sark's fancy, in the idea of the old man's new reso-

lution to share their fortunes, and sin no more. Very likely, this desire was half selfish, based on no higher motive than a wish to be cared for in his helpless old age, as he could rely on being cared for by these kindly people, and by them alone. But perhaps the Professor, like other eminent depredators, had sometimes cherished a day-dream of turning honest one day, when able to afford it, without a probation of poverty. This moral *ignis-fatuus* had very likely hovered before his bleared eyes more frequently since his return from the antipodes, and now, or never, seemed the time to reform.

In the species of informal partnership which was thus agreed upon between the Sarks and their Mentor, confidences were by degrees exchanged, and each member of the association learned something from the statements or conjectures of the others. Little doubt soon existed in the mind of any one of them that in all that had occurred with reference to those concerned, directly or indirectly, in aiding the present peer to obtain the title and estates of Ulswater, the same dark and subtle agency of evil might

be traced. In that mystery of iniquity two persons had taken a prominent part—Loys Sark and Stephen Marsh, M.R.C.S. Of these two persons, one had been foully done to death ; and the other, by the treacherous contrivance of a pretended benefactor, had been banished to a remote part of the world, watched for, and plotted against on her return.

Brum's reserve with reference to his own knowledge on the subject of the murder beside the river had thawed to a great extent. He very plainly avowed that he, the Professor, hiding among the wood-piles, had been an eye-witness of the deadly struggle, and had recognised the assassin. The name of the latter he declined to mention. "There's things best kept quiet, ma'am Sark," he had said inflexibly, in reply to all questioning. "Maybe I've a sort of a softness towards that poor chap—he that did the job—for I know he was brought up bad, and never had a chance. I don't want, anyhow, to do him hurt. But he's a Shellton man born, that's what he is ; and there's somebody down Shellton way—a grand gentleman—owed the doctor no good-will, he didn't."

It seemed, indeed, very probable that Lord Ulswater was he who had employed the murderer of the Shellton surgeon; also that Mr. Marsh had spoken the plain truth when he declared that he could prove by written evidence how perfidious had been the conduct of Mr. Moss, the attorney, in the conduct of James Sark's defence. It seemed scarcely probable that so wily and determined an enemy as their great foe should slacken in his pursuit of the married pair who had his secret. And that Loys was in especial danger seemed but too likely. She had been the actual agent in what had been done at St. Pagan's on that night which had seen the obstacle in John Carnac's path to rank and wealth removed, as he thought, for ever. Her testimony, and that of Mr. Marsh, would have been equally damaging to John Carnac in a court of justice. The surgeon had been effectually silenced. Only one person remained who could swear positively to the deed done at the old abbey in the dead stillness of midnight.

"I wish we were away from this, James," said the wife more than once, wistfully looking in her husband's good-humoured face, more

cheerful now by far than it had been in Cecil Street. "Money or no money, I wish we were at sea, and safe out of England. It may be foolish, but I do wish it, dear."

James Sark laughed at those words then, little deeming that a day would come when their distant echo would sound upon his ear, in vain, with all the sadness of a dirge.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MOSS IS SCEPTICAL.

“I LEAVE it to you, of course, my Lord, to act as you think proper,” said Mr. Moss, pacing to and fro along the little railway platform at Shellton by the side of his tall client; “but if you ask my advice——”

“I do not ask it. Let the man alone, and let the woman alone, and leave me to deal with the matter in my own way,” said Lord Ulswater with an irritability that was not usual with him. He was not often rude to an inferior. His habitual courtesy had stood him in good stead in many a strait, and he was too wise not to know that the manner of doing is often of more consequence than the nature of what is done. But something—could it be the varnish and gloss of gracious gentle chivalry,

the gilding that covered the hardness beneath—was wearing very thin as concerned John, Lord Ulswater.

Mr. Moss, attorney-at-law, was not offended. He could comprehend his client's excitement. The news which he had himself brought down from London was of a kind, as he shrewdly guessed, to cause much mental perturbation to his noble client, albeit it was at Lord Ulswater's express desire that he had left no stone unturned to discover what his employer wished to know. He had telegraphed from London to announce his intention of bringing the tidings in person to St. Pagans; but Lord Ulswater, probably unwilling to endure Lady Harriet's comments on a second visit from the Old Jewry practitioner, had preferred to meet the latter at the station. "You are sure, Moss, there is no mistake?" asked Lord Ulswater again, after a space of silence.

"Quite sure. That boy Ike is about the sharpest-eyed young gonoph in all London," answered Mr. Moss confidently. "He was but a youngster when Dandy Jem left England for the benefit of his health; but he has a capital

memory for faces, and may perhaps one day be valuable in a Private Inquiry Office."

"And the place—yes, here it is, the written address," said the client, taking from his pocket a folded piece of paper. "Quite right, Moss, I thank you."

They walked together for a little time more, silently. Mr. Moss took more than one stealthy look at his noble friend as the latter strode slowly by his side, with downcast eyes, compressed lips, and his hat pulled over his brows. How very stern and pale he was, the lawyer thought. How much of the bloom of youth seemed, in the course of the last few weeks or months, to have gone from him. He had seemed younger, healthier, happier, when he had unexpectedly called at the attorney's office, on the morrow of his great speech in the House of Lords. Was that day years ago? One might have thought so by the change that passion, care, and sleeplessness had wrought so rapidly. That was not the worst of it. Mr. Moss was not sentimental enough to care for the looks of his clients, ill or well; that was a matter for themselves and their doctors; but Lord Uls-

water had a something indefinable about him ; something that Mr. Moss, in his thoughts, could only classify by the vague word "dangerous." He had a lowering look like that of a thunderstorm rolling heavily up before the hot south wind, and it was hard to calculate on whose head the stroke might descend, flashing, fulminant. It was a look that the lawyer very much disliked to see. As a rule, ill-humoured moneyed clients are the apple of an attorney's eye. Without bad temper for a stimulus, few lawsuits would be fought out to the bitter end. But when a litigant seems disposed to take, as the phrase goes, the law into his own hands, prudent solicitors prefer to give the unprofitable desperado a wide berth ; and Lord Ulswater did not seem in the disposition to fight his battles soberly, legally, by help of the deputies of Our Sovereign Lady the Queen, as a man should do.

"I'd give ten guineas out of my own pocket, not to have told him," thought Mr. Moss to himself, with some curious feelings in his breast, which he took for compunction, but which were really due to selfish fear. Suppose something

—he did not care to particularise what—should occur, and all sorts of secrets should come out, what sort of figure should he, N. Moss, gentleman, cut in court and in the columns of the newspapers! Erring brethren of his profession have been struck off the rolls for less than he had done to merit such cashiering.

Perhaps Lord Ulswater divined what was passing in the other's mind, for with that wonderful power over himself that he possessed, he shook off, by a sudden effort, the grim and menacing expression that had stamped itself upon his features. It was a frank, smiling Lord Ulswater that turned towards Moss, saying : "To tell you the truth, Moss, I've seen reason to change my views a good deal about matters on which men of my age are apt to look too lightly and too leniently. I do not wish, and never did wish, to molest these poor people ; my only desire was that they should not molest me. Now, having thought the matter over more deeply, I go further, and say that I have been to blame, and that I owe them reparation.—You look surprised ; but I am in earnest. I wish—

in fact, my conscience is not quite clear on the subject of that poor girl—— ”

“ I always thought as much,” rapped out Mr. Moss, and then could have bitten his tongue for saying the words.

But Lord Ulswater did not take offence. Without noticing the attorney’s interruption, he went on : “ I was young then, and—and I suppose careless and selfish, as young men are. It is not till we grow older and sadder that we begin to trace out the consequences of our own lightly regarded actions, and to perceive how, step by step, we have been the means of thrusting others down the road to ruin. I am sorry, now, that I ever saw Loys Fleming’s face.”

Mr. Moss stared at his client. Lord Ulswater’s voice was grave and deep, and his tone and manner were such as implied, even to the distrustful little lawyer, absolute sincerity. Mr. Moss was a sound believer in that worldly axiom which forbids us to credit anything we hear, and but a bare moiety of what we see. He had had too much experience, however, to doubt that truth might occasionally be spoken by the falsest lips, and he thought that Lord Ulswater,

for the moment, really did mean what he said. "He won't mean it to-morrow, and he didn't mean it yesterday," thought the attorney; "but he does mean it now." Mr. Moss was right. Lord Ulswater's words, for once, came from the heart. He had good reason then, and was in time to come to have better reason still, for wishing that he and Loys Fleming had always been strangers to one another.

He went on speaking upon the same subject after a pause, but this time his voice and manner were merely plausible, merely impressive, as might be those of a good actor or a popular preacher. He talked well, and not without a certain warmth of expression; and Mr. Moss could find no flaw in his discourse, but he did not exactly put faith in its purport. Lord Ulswater desired—so he said—to give a helping hand, without disclosing himself to James Sark and his wife—how, he could hardly tell as yet. It might be that the man, who had not been considered once as a totally irredeemable offender, might be weaned to better things. He was a clever fellow, by all accounts. Lord Ulswater recollected to have heard, while Sark lay

in prison, that he was a man of rare mechanical skill and inventive faculty. It was a pity that such a fellow—a Trevethick or Boulton, for anything one could tell—should waste his powers in picking patent locks or breaking open wrought-iron safes. Much better to give him a fair start, far from old haunts and criminal companions, in a new arena, with assistance enough to keep his head above water till he could swim alone, so to speak.

Lord Ulswater was willing to be at costs and charges on James Sark's behalf. He owed an atonement, he said, to the man and to his wife too, and he meant to be their friend, if only he could find the best way of helping them, without avowedly coming forward in the matter. He owned, too, with engaging frankness, that he was anxious, for his own sake, to hear that they had quitted England for some colony, or for the United States, and were not likely to return. He admitted that Loys Sark might be able and willing to annoy him, should she remain in her native country, and that he would cheerfully undergo some pecuniary sacrifice to prevent this. "In fact," said Lord Ulswater, with his old

bright smile, now so seldom on his lips, "you are welcome to interpret this as you please, and to write me down as a selfish man, glad to give hush-money to bury a dead sin, and close the door upon a past that is best forgotten. I would pay much, very much, to settle those people comfortably and prosperously—not too near to St. Pagans."

Mr. Moss hearkened, sceptical, puzzled; and his client went on to request that he, Mr. Moss, would make cautious inquiry as to James Sark, whether he was still engaged in his old bad trade of plunder, whether he was in communication with his former associates, and, above all, whether he seemed a likely man to reform and repent, should a kind hand be held out to assist him up the road, often steep and stony, that leads out of the mire of crime to the table-land of honesty.

All this Mr. Moss promised to effect, gradually and with discretion, and he further agreed to be the channel of Lord Ulswater's bounty towards the Manxman and his wife. He also accepted, with a decent show of reluctance, a cheque which Lord Ulswater slipped into his hand. It was not by any means the regular thing, this mode

of payment, without bill of costs or vouchers. Castles and Taping, or any other eminent firm of the Castles and Taping stamp, would have been scandalised by having remuneration thus thrust upon them as one fees a railway-porter or an inn-waiter. But a bird in the hand, a rustling, auriferous bird, whose notes were bank-notes, and whose eggs were golden eggs, was grateful to the touch of Mr. N. Moss of the Old Jewry.

And yet Mr. Moss could not divest himself of the impression that his distinguished client was playing a part, playing it very well and gracefully, but as surely feigning as ever did stage-player feign the emotions proper to his part. He had this feeling strong upon him even when the train that was to bear him back to London was ready to start, and he had taken his place, and Lord Ulswater had waved his hand in token of adieu, and stood, watching the receding carriages. Mr. Moss always remembered that last glimpse of his noble employer, so tall, stalwart, and manly, with that pale, handsome face, and the golden hair, on which the sunlight glinted, standing smiling on the platform

as the train began to move ; for Mr. Moss was to see Lord Ulswater, in this life, no more.

When the train had vanished in the distance, the master of St. Pagans mounted his horse, which a countryman was holding at the door of the station, and rode off, taking the intricate road towards Clackley Common. "Mill Lane, Aboukir Street, East Greenwich," he muttered to himself as he rode on. "I have it written here ; but I should not forget it in any case." He tore the paper to shreds, and rode fast upon his way.

CHAPTER IX.

LOYS IS LEFT ALONE.

"IF he knew what we know," cluckled old Brum, smoothing a refractory portion of the nap on his greasy hat—"if he knew what we know, he'd be down on his knees, he would, begging for mercy, your grand Lord would, I reckon."

And James Sark had laughed good-humouredly as he rejoined that such a result was very likely.

But the third member of the conference shook her head. She was less confident. "You do not know him," she said; "I do, worse luck. If John Carnac were aware of the truth, and also that the whole wicked history is only known to us three"—She stopped, shuddering, and her dark eyes, with a stony horror in

them such as may have dwelt in those of fateful Cassandra, remained fixed upon the blankness of the oak-panelled wall.

"Why, Loys, why, lass, *you* a coward! What next?" cried her husband soothingly, and he laid his hand upon her shoulder. She shuddered again. "What ails you?—I never knew her like this, Professor, in all this time we've been together," said Jem, ruefully.

Loys passed her hand over her fair smooth forehead. She seemed to recover herself, but with an evident effort. "I felt," she said—"I felt as if some one were walking over my grave, as we Furness folks used to say." She tried to smile now, but the attempt was a failure. "I am very foolish; don't mind me," she said.

James Sark took one or two quick turns up and down the little room. "Look here, Loys, my love," he said: "you know well enough that this affair was none of my contriving. I never liked it, never cared to meddle with it from the first. But I took it up to please you, dear, and now it makes you miserable that I should leave you, even for a few hours, to fetch the boy home. I wish we were in Australia

again. I wish we were beyond seas—anywhere. You'll go melancholy mad, my girl, moping here in this sort of way. Say the word, and I'll not go to London to-day, or the Professor shall stop with you."

Loys dashed back the dark hair from her brow. This time, she succeeded in smiling, but the smile was a sad one. "I am getting fanciful," she said: "don't humour me, Jem. You spoil me, you are so kind. Scold me, now, do, for I should be much the better for it. But I won't keep you, and I won't keep the Professor. There—go, and bring back the boy with you. I never should forgive myself if harm happened to that poor child; and it would happen if John Carnac knew that he was among the living."

That permanent council of war which had established its pavilion in the late dwelling of the eccentric Mr. Vanpeerenboom, among the market-gardens of East Greenwich, had finally decided upon giving practical effect to Loys Sark's declaration, often repeated, that "justice must be done." Justice, it was meant, to a certain small child-pupil, Paul West by name,

as entered in the books of the pseudo-doctor's classical and commercial academy at Belleview House, Clapham—justice to that bright-eyed boy, too young and too innocent to know that he had any rights, save to sundry marbles respectively entitled “taws,” “alleys,” and “agates,” to a sufficient slice of the Sunday's plum-pudding, and to the arbitrarily disputed privilege to “cooey” during play-hours in true bush-style.

Paul, little Paul, was to have justice done to him. Broad lands, and a stately home, and a noble name, and a birthright to sit among the hereditary legislators of his native country, and to help in making and mending that country's laws and policy, were his, if each one had his due.

“I never thought, when the thing was done, to see the boy righted, or to wish him to be righted,” said Loys quite simply to her husband and to Bruin. “I had suffered too much from his class to be fair towards one of them. I hated gentle blood and all who claimed it.—How do I know, I used to ask myself, that this innocent pretty babe, smiling up at me with his

dear blue eyes and rosy mouth, is not merely as a cub-tiger, gentle because it is weak? How do I know that he will not grow up to a man, callous, haughty, selfish, tempting foolish maidens to sin and ruin, hard, pitiless?—I used to say these things to myself, and then I did not mean the child to get his own again. Why should I trouble myself to make him rich and great? I had been kinder to him than those of his own blood and name had been. It was thanks to me, bad as I was, that he lived, and smiled, and sported in the gay morning sunshine, instead of lying, where his kinsman would have had him laid, in the dark cold grave, or beneath the deep sea. It was enough for him to be alive. I owed him nothing more.”

“You were sore and angry, Loys, dear,” Sark would say in his good-humoured, cheery voice. “You came to think better of it afterwards. We both got fond of the kid, didn’t we, when we had him to ourselves, out in Australia there?”

The Manxman had not, perhaps, any very strong sympathies with poetical justice. He was a man quick to anger, and prone to resent

an intentional injury, but by no means indiscriminating in his wrath, and as free from prejudice as can well be. He neither hated nor liked the upper stratum of society, not crediting its members with any peculiar bias towards vice or virtue, and cynically convinced that men and women were strangely alike, whatever their degree, and that the same passions, somewhat modified, were to be found in every grade, from the highest to the lowest.

“After all, it’s a plaguy shame to keep a young chap out of his own, just because his own happens to be finer than most of us have the chance to get. He’s a right to his luck. Let him have the benefit of it,” the returned transport had said. The vote was unanimous. Paul West was to be reinstated in his rights. But it was not to be expected that James Sark, a runaway from one of Her Majesty’s penal settlements beyond seas, should undertake the “champertry and maintenance” of the young heir. He could not haunt law-courts, figure in consultations, cause notices to be served, forward petitions, file bills, and fight the legal battle in the legal way. The law had too tremendous a lien

upon its penal serf for that to be feasible. There was a metaphorical collar of slavery around the Manxman's neck, quite as potent for restraint as the actual metallic collar around the throat of Gurth the swineherd. It would have been Quixotic to undertake the part of a redresser of wrongs, thus burdened. In America, the case would be different. It had been decided that the intending emigrants should abandon their original design of waiting for Lord Ulswater's expected remittance to arrive *per ambages* of Palmer Brothers. One of Dandy Jem's inventions, a valuable simplification of some expensive and complicated machinery, had found a purchaser. A City firm had seen its merits, and were willing to buy the diagrams and the working model, taking out the patent at their own cost, and reaping the ultimate profit. The inventor was to get such remuneration as the lion capitalist is apt to think the fair share of the jackal projector—not very many pounds, be sure. But Sark had other strings to his bow, and he was content. That ready money—he was to receive it on that very afternoon—would carry him, and his wife, and the boy, to some

Pennsylvanian town, where his skill would bring in a weekly crop of dollars, enough to live upon. Then Loys and Brum, being in no danger from British detectives, could repair to New York, and thence begin the war that was to conquer wealth and rank for little Paul.

“I know the Yankees,” Sark had said tritely: “they just worship a Lord, let them talk as tall as they choose. You’ll easily find a lawyer, and a respectable one, to take up a case that will be sure to fill sensation columns of the *Herald* and the *Tribune*. The Yankee lawyer will correspond with an English lawyer; the suit will begin, and all London will ring with it; the boy will be able to come back to England safely, because so many pair of eyes will be on the watch, that his uncle wouldn’t dare, bless you, to hurt him; and your humble servant will get a free pardon, that he may be examined before the House of Lords. See if it don’t turn out as I tell you.”

No plan, indeed, could promise more fairly. On that very day, the money was to be paid by the City firm; on that very day, James Sark, in his quality of Mrs. Fletcher’s husband and

the boy's relative by marriage, was to remove young Paul West from the Clapham school, and bring him to the Dutch gardener's villa among the marshes and market-produce; on that very day, the Professor was to proceed to the Docks, and there to make inquiry at shipping-offices and water-side publics known to him, as to vessels bound for Philadelphia. In a few days, by one route or by another, the exiles would be at sea, out of reach of their enemy, and free.

Yet it was strange to see how lingeringly and unwillingly Loys took leave of her husband. He had left her before, more than once, since they had taken refuge in this wigwam of the defunct Vanpeerenboom, but never had she clung to him before as she clung to him then, under pretence of brushing away the dust from his coat, or of adjusting his glossy light-brown hair, as it was her loving custom to do. He saw her repugnance to part with him; but for her sake, and attributing this fancy to the tension of overwrought nerves, he feigned not to see it. He affected to be in higher spirits than common, talking confidently and boastfully of

their approaching departure, of the fortune he was to make in America, and of how he should be a senator, minister of the United States in some European capital, or governor of Michigan or Minnesota, before he died.

And now old Brum, considerably smartened and improved as to his outer man, in compliment to Mrs. Sark, was ready, and waiting in the porch for James to accompany him in the walk to the steam-boat wharf, and so to London. It had been agreed that they should go to London by water, and return by train or by boat, as Paul should prefer.

"I know he'll choose the water-way: anything like a ship is a treat to him," the Manxman had said. Jem kissed his wife, resolutely smiling the while, and walked briskly out, humming a tune. He was clear of the porch, when he heard his name called in an eager, tremulous voice, and he came hurrying back. "Why, Loys, sweetheart!" he exclaimed.

She was in tears, but she smiled even as she looked at him with streaming, wistful eyes, and put out her arms towards him. "Kiss me once more, James, only once." And as he bent and

kissed her wet cheek, she laughed, and pushed him from her. "How good you are to me," she said ; "and I am a fool not to be blithe as you are. Now go, dear boy, go." So James Sark and the Professor went to London, thinking no evil ; and Loys was left alone.

CHAPTER X.

RUN OVER IN THE STREET.

BRUM, parting from his friend James Sark as soon as the Greenwich steamer had landed them at the Adelphi Stairs, and leaving the Manxman to pursue his journey to Clapham, turned his own face eastward. Being ostensibly bound for the Docks, it would have seemed natural that he should have disembarked at an earlier stage of the up-river voyage, but the Professor had some of the instincts which protect the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and never went by a straight path to his nest or den when a crooked one was available. He had no particular reason to believe himself followed or watched, but the old habit of doubling and twisting was too deeply rooted in him to be easily abandoned; and it was with comparative

regret that he found himself in a broad and crowded thoroughfare, moving Citywards in company with a dense stream of human beings. Everybody was out of town, naturally, in that sultry, early autumn weather, and at that dead time of year—everybody, that is, likely to come within the focus of Belgravian eye-glasses, or to be visible to the astronomers of Mayfair as stars of even the fourth magnitude. But the nameless nebulæ remained, thick as sand-grains on the sea-shore, and dazzling in their uncounted numbers. Fashionable London was away. The fly was off the wheel; and yet the wheel went round, fast and furious, although the gilded insect with the gauzy wings and gorgeous hues was unconscious of its gyrations. The grindstones of the mighty mill still did their stern work, crushing the bones of some to make the bread of others, pretty much as if the Cornish giants Cormoran and Feefawfum had been the monstrous millers. The fight for existence was going on, as usual, without truce or stay, although Chirper, and Tregooze, and Gunnesley Fitzgeorge, and the ladies who bowed to them from barouches, or danced with them

at embassy balls, were dispersed like the last year's snow.

There were many carts, and vans, and carriages, public and private, struggling, and jamming, and jostling along the street, as Brum passed along it, elbowing his way eastward. "Hullo! I declare I do believe it is! Thought he was dead!" exclaimed the Professor suddenly. He had caught sight of an old man gazing in at a shop-window with a patient curiosity that pointed him out as no true London resident. Even a Londoner, no doubt, may look into a shop-window, but not with that forgetfulness of self which a countryman exhibits. The genuine Cockney may by no means have exhausted all the eleemosynary sights which liberal metropolitan tradesmen offer to the world of possible customers, but he has seldom time for more than a cursory glance, and is, besides, contemptuously familiar with arrangements of stock the most striking and showy.

"Thought he was dead!" repeated Brum aloud. The man who was looking at the display behind the huge sheet of plate-glass was a tall, lean, stooping, ungainly old fellow, with

high shoulders and supple back. There was something deferential in his attitude, as he stood cringingly there, looking very much as if he were apologising to the shop for taking the liberty to stare without purchasing. He had a mean, crafty face, a long nose, slightly reddened, gray hair, and a shifty, restless expression. He was certainly not intoxicated. No policeman would have been justified in hauling him off to figure in the inspector's report of the drunk and incapable; but he was fresh, or stale, from dram-drinking, sodden with much alcohol, chronically soaked into the system.

This old man was just such a frightful example as a temperance society would have liked to parade on its platform—a muddled, fuddled, human scarecrow to warn off the British youth from the gin-palace and the taproom—a boozy Helot, good to inspire disgust into the young Spartans of Teetotalism. He was a Helot in another sense, too, for he wore such a greatcoat as no one, whatever his taste, would have purchased with his own moneys and of his freewill—a skimped, short-waisted, long-skirted, high-collared greatcoat, pepper and salt as to its

colour, pewter as to its buttons, and with mysterious parochial initials conspicuously stamped upon its lower hem. It looked like a livery, and it was one—the livery of pauperism.

“Workus, by George!” cried Brum, in his surprise.

The two old men were now very near to one another, insomuch that Brum’s voice reached the ears of the object of his remark, and the aged pauper looked up, not angrily, but with a sort of deprecatory smirk upon his face. A wonderful change came over that face, as his twinkling eyes encountered those bleared ones of the rat-visaged Professor. Growing pale at once, and arching his shaggy eyebrows, the wearer of workhouse habiliments took one quick, half-frightened look at Brum, and then turned and shuffled off as fast as his lean limbs could carry him. Brum made no attempt at pursuit, but his eyes followed the slinking figure till it was lost in the crowd of foot-passengers.

“Pah! there’s a finish for him!” muttered the Professor, with strong disgust, and he too shambled on.

Almost immediately afterwards there was a

roar and a rush, and an outcry of loud voices, and a stamping of horses' feet, and an uplifting of whips by way of signal to coming drivers to hold in and wait. The tide of people swayed forward. — "Somebody hurt!" — "Somebody killed!" — "Run over!" — "A cab, wasn't it?" — "No, a van!" — "Poor old chap!" Brum pushed forward.

A van it was, one of those high Juggernaut cars, laden mountainously with bales, and chests, and weighty packages from the railway, that rush thundering through London streets at the fastest trot of their team of three strong horses. A van it was, though the fore-horse was thrown back on his haunches now, with an excited policeman grasping the bridle, while the driver, perched aloft on his tall box, appealed to men and angels to bear witness that what had happened was no fault of his. Nor, perhaps, was it so. A foot-passenger, an old man, had tried to cross the street at a very inopportune moment, through the thickest of the traffic, had rushed blindly on to get out of the way of a Hansom and its shouting charioteer, and had come "mooning," as a bystander phrased it, right

under the very nose of the leader of the van-team. No one, not Briareus, could have pulled up the heavy horses in time to prevent mischief.

"He's alive. The wheel didn't go over him, though it was just a shave from his head," said one Samaritan of the three or four who were lifting from the stones the pepper-and-salt bundle that represented a living man. A very crumpled, miserable, gray-headed bundle it looked, as it was thus lifted, the blood running from a cut on the head and dabbling the gray hair.

"Look at the hat!" said some one, holding up for inspection what looked like an imperfect cylinder of black felt, the crown quite crushed out by the pressure of the horses' iron-shod feet. A doctor came up, and declared himself, feeling the hurt man's ribs and limbs, and laying his practised finger and thumb upon the wrist.

"Pulse almost imperceptible," the doctor said; "only the collar-bone broken; but that's a nasty knock on the head. Better get the poor old fellow to the hospital at once."

More police had by this time come up, with a stretcher, and there were volunteers willing to help in carrying the load. Old Brum came

forward. "I know him," he said, touching his greasy hat to the police sergeant; "he's my brother-in-law, though I've not seen him for years. Please, I should like to be let see him."

The sergeant looked sharply at Brum. No, he did not recognise the Professor as one of his, the sergeant's, "lambs," one of that black flock whose frequent fold was the little dock of the police-court. Brum was by far more decently dressed than he had been before he cast in his lot with the Sarks. He wore a greasy hat still, but his coat was of well-brushed black cloth, his chin shaven, his neck-cloth neat, and his face but half dirty, not wholly so as before. "You may come," said the sergeant shortly; and Brum walked beside the stretcher.

The hospital once reached, the stretcher and its passive occupant were speedily filtered through the ordeal of the porter's lodge, and Brum was bidden to wait. There were other friends of patients there: a middle-aged, motherly woman in rusty mourning, and with a widow's cap under her cavernous bonnet, a garrulous, simple soul, who told all listeners how she came from Peckham Rye, twice a week, to see her

poor daughter in hospital; and two or three other persons, among whom was a journeyman plasterer in a paper-cap, with great stains of whitewash mottling his clothes, and clots of whitewash clinging to his limp whiskers. Before the widow had quite concluded her explanation, for Brum's behoof, of the injury which her daughter had received from some unfenced machinery in a factory "Mile End way," and of the doctor's cheerful prophecy that she would pull through it, a dresser entered the waiting-room. "Friends of patient just brought in? Running-over case. Accident Ward," said the dresser; and Brum announced himself, and was led up-stairs.

The patient was in bed, his hurts had been inspected by the house-surgeon, and he was now sensible, Brum was told, as he proceeded towards the clean, orderly ward, with its rows of white beds, neat and orderly, but terribly suggestive of the agony and distress that tenanted them, week by week and day by day. Every one of the officials seemed to Brum to be kind after an unsentimental fashion—cool, self-possessed, and business-like. The place was an

establishment for the mending of broken and bruised humanity, as far as human skill and care, with the best appliances, could effect the repairs within a reasonable time. An average amount of cures could thus be attained, and to make the maximum a high one was the first duty of nurse, doctor, and managing committee. The duty was done, and in the main well done, though there was little enthusiasm to be detected.

"Now, don't excite the patient. Brother-in-law, eh? Well, don't make him talk too long, do you hear?—Not a very bad case. Collar-bone and cut on head are the worst of it. Constitution feeble; soddened with gin I'm afraid. Had he been a temperate man, it would have been a trifle.—Nurse, five minutes' talk will be enough—do you hear?" And off went the honest house-surgeon on his rounds.

Brum approached the bed in which the gray-headed bundle that had been picked up among the horses' feet had been made comfortable. The old man was evidently quite rational now.

"How do you do, Willy?" The sufferer piped out these words in a thin wheezy voice, and he made an effort to put out his feeble right

hand in token of amity. "You don't bear malice, I hope?"

The Professor shook his head. "I'm too old, myself, to keep anger hot after all these years," said he, more gently than it was usual for him to speak. "I'm sorry, Benjamin Huller, to see you like this, I must say that, for all that's come and gone."

"What did the doctor whisper about me?" asked Benjamin Huller, with a look of keen interest lighting up his shrunken face. "I know he told you something. Shall I die this bout?"

The Professor hesitated. The house-surgeon had not indeed told him in so many words that the hurts sustained by the new patient would end fatally. But eyes and mouth, even in the case of house-surgeons, sometimes reveal the adverse opinion which doctors easily form, but are chary of proclaiming. Also, in his adventurous life, old Brum had seen the seal of coming death on many faces, and he saw it now on that of his estranged brother-in-law. But not being at heart a really bad man, Brum was unwilling to give pain to the crushed creature

before him by any harsh truth-telling, albeit he had scanty cause to love Benjamin Huller.

"Well, Ben," he said, "you must be careful, you know, and so you must," the Professor said soothingly: "it's a serious thing, a floorer like that for an elderly cove like me or you. But even if it's a long job——"

But here the patient's piping voice broke in. "Willy, you're telling me lies—out of kindness though. Thank you. You mean to be good to me; but it's no use. I'm a dying man. I shall never go out of this ward, but to be buried."

The old pauper's glassy eyes peered up at Brum's shrewd face as he spoke, and he ended with a groan, for we all hope, even in Death's gripe, and he read an involuntary confirmation of his worst fears in the quaint countenance of the old man who looked down upon him, not unkindly.

"Willy!" gasped the injured man, catching, with uncertain fingers, at the other's sleeve—"Willy! I didn't use you well, nor yet your sister, did I? You were right fond of her once, I know. You might forgive me now."

These words were spoken imploringly, with piteous mowings and quiverings of the poor twitching mouth that uttered them.

Brum felt a curious choking in his throat as he made answer: "Don't take on, Ben, that way; let bygones be bygones."

"Hark! Willy, hark!" eagerly whispered old Huller. "I'll make your fortune, I swear I will. I'll make up for the past. I've got a secret, I have, that is worth a thousand pounds, and you shall have the gain of it, when I'm laid in my grave. I meant to have the gain myself. But it's too late — death—— O bring a magistrate!—a—I'll make a clean breast of all the wicked story I know—Lord Ulswater—the child——" The piping voice ceased.

"Lord Ulswater!—are you in that game, Ben?" cried Brum excitedly; but he got no answer.

The nurse came hurrying up. "Can't you see he's fainted. You just go, please. You heard the doctor. Time's up, and more. He can't talk again to-day. Come to-morrow, if you choose."

So Brum was quietly and firmly thrust out.

"Here's more of it!" he chuckled to himself as he passed out into the street. Jem must hear of this. What can the old man know of the St. Pagans job? But he was always a deep one. I'll have a cab, to save time. We shall turn the tables on my Lord after all."

CHAPTER XI.

BELLEVIEW HOUSE WITH THE BLINDS DOWN.

JAMES SARK was in high spirits, whistling a lively tune as he walked briskly up the hill on which stood Belleview House. He did not know Clapham at all, and he had had to ask his way more than once. But he enjoyed the walk, and the beauty of the hot autumn day, with its violet sky streaked by loose long threads of attenuated white cloud, and the stir and freshness and the faint breeze, unfelt in the streets, but strong enough, on that elevated land which Sark was traversing, to make the yellowing leaves of the poplars rustle merrily overhead.

The Manxman was by nature sanguine. He had drifted into evil ways and bad comradeship, but he was not irreclaimably of the wicked. He was not mean, not treacherous, not cruel as

yet. To lead an honest life, always provided that the said life should be exempt from stagnation and blank monotony, was his sincere desire. A fair day's wage for a fair day's work, seemed more attractive to him, clever workman and long-headed contriver that he was, than it would perhaps have done to four-fifths of his former companions. He was so far from being an idle man, that the gift of a large annuity, on the condition of doing nothing henceforth, would have been as a Dead Sea apple between his teeth.

The sail up the river, among masts, and rigging, and fluttering flags, had done him good. The very sight of the ships suggested pleasant thoughts of blue water, of a fair wind and good voyage, and of the new land and the new life beyond.

"Hey for America!" exclaimed Dandy Jem, aloud; and a working-man, who had just turned into the road from a side-lane, started at the sound of Sark's voice, believing himself to have been addressed.

"Did you speak to me, sir?" asked the working-man.

"No, I did not," replied the Manxman

smiling; "but perhaps you can kindly point out Belleview House—a school?"

The man civilly said that he was going there, and that he should be happy to show the way; and the two walked on together, side by side.

James Sark, whose eye was rarely at fault, had taken in the bearings of the other at a glance. "Not a journeyman," he thought—"small master-tradesman. Half-joiner, half-undertaker." This was not an unwarranted conjecture, for the carpenter carried beneath his arm a bran-new coffin, of small size—not an infant's coffin, however, but such as might be made for a child of ten years old or thereabouts. Narrow and light as it was, with its new brass-headed nails and name-plate glimmering yellow against the background of black cloth, it was long enough to be an awkward load for one man.

"Let me help you with that. Yes, yes; I'll bear a hand up the hill," said Sark good-humouredly; and the carpenter, who was on the wrong side of fifty, was thankful for the assistance. He had been whistling an air nearly as lively as that whistled by his new acquaintance, when he turned out of the lane, but had

ceased, partly because such melody seemed indecorous in connection with the funereal burden he bore, and partly because the day was hot, and the hill steep.

"By the by," said Sark, as a fresh thought occurred to him, "I hope there's nothing wrong there?—at Bellevue House I mean?" he added, nodding significantly towards the coffin.

The suburban undertaker looked round at the questioner in some surprise. "Why, hain't you heard?" he said dubiously.

"No, I've heard nothing," returned Sark, in his quick way. "A boy dead, then? Any sickness among the kids?—Hang it, speak out, mate, will you!"

The master-mechanic, a poor guerilla skirmisher in that Black Army whereof Mr. Banting may be reckoned as a field-marshal, lowered the end of the coffin to the ground, and wiped his brows with a red handkerchief. "P'raps you're parents and guardians?" he said hesitatingly. "Dr. Marsh mightn't like—but there! there ain't no use trying to hush it up now. Fever's been mortal bad among the boys—mortal bad, surely. Three of 'em died. I'm

a-taking up of this for the third. Most of the pupils has been fetched home, and the 'cademy's quite empty, only for two West India boys as was always holiday-stoppers, and hain't got no relations in England for to take 'em in, and one other little vun, ill in bed."

That was all that Sark, now thoroughly alarmed, could extract from the coffin-maker. The latter did not even remember the names of the two children who had been the first to die, though he had the measurements of their last little beds accurately enough in his memory. "Three foot eleven, by one, ten, and five-eights," he said, cogitating the while: "four foot two, by one, eleven, and a half. This one is bigger—four foot four, by two, one, and three-eights; and the name"—reading it from the brass coffin-plate—"is Master Gray." But the name of the boy who was ill, and the actual state of that boy, the man of rule and plane did not know. "I believe he's a little mite of a chap," was all that he could say about the small sufferer. Sark pushed on, fearing the worst.

Bellevue House, with its shutters closed, and its range of close-drawn blinds blankly

staring down from the upper windows, looked very melancholy. So did the two lonely West Indian boys—a brace of Robinson Crusoes, with the gravelled Sahara of a playground in lieu of a desert island, and the solitary school-room full of echoes and ink-splashes for a cave. They came at the clang of the bell, scrambling up the wall, and thrusting their sallow young faces over the bricks, like horses gazing disconsolately out from the pound, or as if they had been verily marooned upon some sandy islet of their native Caribbean Sea, and were hoping for a sail to heave in sight and bring rescue and release.

Dr. Marsh, very flabby, pasty-complexioned, and loose about the neckcloth, with his black scholastic coat ill brushed, and a faint odour of alcoholic stimulants surrounding him like a perfume, met Sark's questions in a nervous, weak-minded style. He was a ruined man, he said. The school would never recover the blow. Confidence in the healthy situation, the sanitary arrangements, and the parental supervision for which the academy had been famous, would never be restored. That dreadful fever! The

schoolmaster really appeared to consider himself an injured man, and the victim of a sort of tacit conspiracy in which the complaint itself, the boys who had been so inconsiderate as to catch it and die, and the relatives of the survivors, had all been more or less concerned and confederate.

“I wrote to your wife, Mr. Fletcher, to apprise her of the state of the case, and Mrs. Marsh wrote afterwards, to Cecil Street, Strand. If the letters miscarried through the change of residence of which you tell me, it is no fault of mine—now, is it?” said the schoolmaster? and Sark could not but own that the principal of Belleview House had done all that could reasonably be expected at his hands.

Little Paul West was ill of the fever. Dr. Marsh declined to give any opinion of his own as to his prospects of recovery. That every care had been taken of him, that he had the best medical advice which Clapham could supply, and that the doctor came twice a day to visit him, and would come again that evening, were the only further statements to be drawn from the worried and despondent

shepherd of that empty fold, stripped of its tenants.

“Can I see the child?” asked Sark with a sinking heart. The poor fellow was beginning to realise that he had been fonder of the bright lovable boy than he had deemed himself to be. Dr. Marsh would make inquiry. The result of the inquiry was the information that Paul, who had long been restless, had been lulled to sleep by some potion sent in by the apothecary who attended him, and was quietly lying in his tiny bed. To disturb him would be wrong. The gentleman, his uncle, had better call again, if convenient. Sark asked at what hour the doctor would pay his evening visit. He would come again, he said, to hear if there were grounds for hope, and to see the boy, if the seeing him would be unattended with risk to the little invalid. He shook hands with the principal of the abandoned academy, and went out. As he was passing the outer gates, the weak-eyed, weak-whiskered young man in the pantry-jacket, more dejected now than ever, ran after him. •

“Please, the doctor says Dr. Simmons did

say something about Master West. Master forgot it. He said : 'Our little friend has a very good constitution.' That's the doctor's message." And with this crumb of comfort, Sark was shut out of Belleview House, the eyes of the melancholy West Indians following him wistfully as he strode away.

All went well in the City, whither Sark now went ; that is to say, the moneyed firm that had agreed to purchase his invention paid for it in crackling new bank-notes, and even hinted at a desire for further dealings. He went out of their counting-house comparatively rich, with the means to reach America secured, but his heart was heavy, and he dreaded the effect upon Loys, should the child die.

This man was not much disposed, by temperament or by custom, to take a dark view of the future ; but he came of a race whose heirloom is a strong imaginative faculty, deeply tinged with gloom, and he had been bred among the gigantic precipices, the dusky corries, the bleak mountains, mist—enshrouded, and the stormy seas of Man. Old, half-forgotten legends, old snatches of rhyme, fragments of the supersti-

tious past, came forcing themselves, in darkling procession, upon his startled fancy, and fear crept in upon him. The notion that the boy at school should die, with the wrong that had been done him unrepaired, was painful in itself to the man's softening heart, but with it came a more selfish apprehension. "It will bring a judgment upon me and mine," Sark thought: "no good luck for us if that child dies." And he found himself caring less for the money, the fairly-earned money in his pocket, than he had ever thought it possible to do.

The place of rendezvous with Brum had been chosen—a cool, dark, almost subterranean tavern, where regular customers sat in their separate compartments, fenced off from one another as if they had been in so many high-backed pews of the true British pattern, and blinked over the small print of their newspapers as they listened to the distant music of chops and steaks frizzling noisily for their entertainment. Sark had not waited very long in this twilight Valhalla of beef before Brum joined him. The Professor had used his cab to good purpose, had gathered up his water-side information about days of

sailing, rates of passage-money, and the private characters of ships and commanders, owners and mates; things momentous to the emigrant who can pay but a moderate price for the accommodation of his floating hotel, yet who is naturally averse to be drowned, starved, maltreated, or stinted of air, light, and elbow-room. However, this intelligence was thrown into the shade by what each of the associates had to tell, the one mentioning the child's illness, the other the fact that revelations of importance, bearing on the usurpation of his rights, had been promised by old Benjamin Huller, then in hospital.

"What matters if the boy does not live?" said Sark moodily, as he pushed aside the food and liquor that he had ordered, but that had remained untasted before him. "Loys will never forgive herself, never. — Come up to Clapham, if you've rested yourself." And Brum finished his glass, and rose. "We shall be too early. Sun's up still," he remarked. But to Clapham they went, and waited, hanging about Belleview House for hours. At last the doctor came. A sensible, honest-faced apothecary

he was, one of those comfortable, comforting practitioners who can think of the patient as well as the fee, and who had had an immense amount of practice in a humdrum way.

"I tell you frankly, Mr. Fletcher, that it is a sad pity you failed to get the letters that Dr. and Mrs. Marsh wrote. Prompt removal is the wisest course in such a case," said Mr. Simmons, not noticing how Sark winced at the implied reproach. "I prefer saying nothing decisive till I have seen my little patient again."

Presently the doctor came down stairs with a troubled face. The boy was ill—very ill. The effects of the sedative given that day had gone off; and the worthy apothecary was not ashamed to own that he thought he had made a mistake in giving the excitable little invalid any morphine at all. Paul was awake, tossing about in his bed, restless, with a high pulse, and in a state bordering on delirium. A night of unrest was very much to be dreaded, at that turning-point of the disorder.

"There's one thing might quiet him," said the doctor thoughtfully. "Perhaps he may be very fond of you, Mr. Fletcher?—That's well.

And you could coax him to go to sleep, could you, in Australia, when he was ill, could you? And to take medicines from your hand when he refused them from other people? That's well again. You look the sort of man children would like. Now if you'd sit by our little friend, and be very patient, and humour him by telling him a story or humming him songs till he grows drowsy, why, he might get a good sound sleep."

"I will," said James Sark eagerly: "and then, doctor, will he recover?"

"Please God, he may. Mind you, I don't say he will; but it's his best chance," said the doctor seriously.

Hour after hour dragged by, and Brum, in the nearest late-closing public-house, puffed at his pipe, and grew weary of waiting, and still Sark sat, patient, kind, tender as a woman, as seafaring men not seldom are, beside the sick child's bed. With his little hand in Sark's, and clinging to him as if he held on to life by that grasp of a well-known hand, Paul lay till deep into the night. My Lord Judge who sentenced James (very properly) would have wondered

to see the man's gentleness and thoughtfulness in the course of that vigil, how light was the touch of his muscular hand, how soft his voice, as he talked child-talk, and told stories such as children care to hear, and soothed and petted the tiny suffering creature that lay there, with large eyes and a thin wan face, hectic-crimson in the cheeks that had been so round and blooming. "What will Loys think? I wish I had sent Brum back. She will be afraid for me, I mean"—Sark thought, once and again. But he could not go; the child's fevered hand held him as iron gyves would scarcely have done. When he wanted to rise and go, the little creature, half asleep, moaned and woke.

Late at night, the small hot hand, that had been growing cooler and less dry and hard for some time, relaxed its pressure. Little Paul West was asleep—a deep, sound sleep. The Manxman waited and kept motionless for half an hour or more, until the boy's regular breathing assured him that the slumber was no fitful doze, and then, very silently, with unshod feet, he slipped out of the room. An hour and a

half afterwards, he and Brum were back at Greenwich. It was above two hours after midnight. "Loys will think we are lost," said James Sark cheerily, as they reached the entrance of Mill Lane. "We shall be scolded," he added.

CHAPTER XII.

IN MILL LANE.

THE white threads of cloud that had spanned the violet sky, and at which James Sark had gazed from the steamer's deck as he went confidently up the river to London, had changed their colour more than once, as the day died out. From white to pink, from pink to crimson edged with lilac, from crimson to flaming orange, and so to dull copper and duller black, those floating vapour-tissues had varied, stage by stage, till the red sun went down. It was dark night presently, for the autumn twilight did not long struggle against the fog rolling in from the Thames, and the moon was but a pale and broken circlet, a mere thread of lucid gold. It was a dark night. Dark in the wide Woolwich Road, where bright gushes of

gaslight overflowed the doorways of the public-houses, where fantail burners flared in the windows of the little shops, and where the street-lamps shone in regular array, each lamp with a gauzy halo of fog around it. Darker in Aboukir Street, the gin-palaces of which were less brilliant, and the intervals between the lighted shop-fronts greater. Darkest in the lanes that branched off, now between rows of gaunt, black wooden palings, with a crown of spikes or vicious-looking crooked nails to defend the crest of the palisades, now with a wall to left and right, and in some cases bordered only by a ragged hedge and deep and slimy ditch. Darkest of all, perhaps, in Mill Lane, where a strongly-built man, to all appearance a sailor, was loitering nearly opposite to the high wooden gate that gave admission to the garden and cottage, late the residence of the dead Dutch gardener, Vanpeerenboom; the same cottage in which the Sarks dwelt. The lounge, in his rough seaman's garments, had been hanging about that neighbourhood all day, sometimes in the streets, sometimes traversing the lanes, and occasionally seated close to the red-curtained

window of a beer-shop that commanded a view of Mill Lane, or rather of the end of that dismal thoroughfare from which it would be entered by any one coming from London. But wherever he was, and whatever he did, he kept watch, in a stealthy, catlike manner, upon Mill Lane and the few that passed into it or out of it.

A sturdy, broad-shouldered fellow, with a pea-jacket of shaggy cloth, such as pilots and North Sea salvage-seekers wear, with a low-crowned glazed hat pulled down so as to shade the upper part of his scarred face, with a blue seaman's shirt-collar hanging loose about his sunburnt bull-neck, and a wisp of black silk knotted more loosely still by way of cravat. An ugly customer, emphatically. He walked with the sailor's rolling gait, and wore his mariner's garments like one who was used to them ; and the brawny wrists that protruded from the wide cuffs of his foul-weather coat were tattooed with as good gunpowder as ever was served out for small-arm practice on board a Queen's ship.

And yet, in spite of tattooing, and sunburnt neck and face, and seagoing clothes, some excep-

tionally good judge of such matters—say a smart first-lieutenant of a crack frigate or the boatswain of a liner—might have pronounced the man a sham, and no true forecandle Jack. But it is harder than most people suppose to detect a counterfeit seaman. Even real old sailors cannot refuse their halfpence to the bawling ballad-singing impostor, theatrically attired, who never in his life handled running rigging or holystoned a deck; and the wearer of the glazed hat and monkey-jacket passed muster very well in Aboukir Street, where the inhabitants were as well accustomed to the sight of seafaring men as well may be. Yet the naval lieutenant would have been right in his opinion, for the lounging, loitering mariner was no other than Bendigo Bill. He was waiting now, waiting, not patiently or with indifference, but in a restless fashion, for *something* to happen, something that was delayed longer than he had expected would be the case. He had taken up his station nearly, but not quite, in front of the old wooden gate, with the white paint peeling off it, under the influence of sun and rain, that led into the market-garden which still went by the name of

“Old Van’s.” He stood in the ditch, the mud of which was nearly dried by the hot weather, and sheltered himself as much as he could behind the gnarled stem of a hollow tree, a low, rotten, black stump, that had been a pollard willow once, when green fields overspread the site of the market-gardens. Behind this wreck of a tree he lurked, attentive to every sound that reached him.

The presence of such a grim sentinel would have attracted remark and suspicion anywhere else. But in Mill Lane there were no windows whence unfriendly eyes could count how often the ill-looking sailor-fellow had passed and repassed; and since dark there had not been a single wayfarer to disturb the prowling figure behind the shattered willow-tree. Groups were often seen and heard near the black gaping mouth of the lane, talking loud, singing, laughing, and sometimes brawling in the gaslit street, a third of which was taken up by blank bare stretches of dead-wall. But no one had turned into Mill Lane itself since the watchman, in the pay of the market-gardeners, went by just at moonrise. But the watchman, whose natural enemies were

the boys, and the objects of his protecting care cucumbers and wall-fruit, had scarcely given a glance to the sauntering blue-jacket smoking his pipe in the cool of the evening beneath the old willow-tree.

The police might be more troublesome ; and indeed, whenever the distant clink of an iron-shod boot-heel on the Aboukir Street pavement reached the ears of the ambushed ruffian, and the well-known blue uniform appeared at the corner of Mill Lane, as the wearer paused to take a long look into the darkness, Bendigo Bill drew back into the deepest of the shadow, and his hand slid within his rough outer coat, with the gesture of a hand that seeks and grasps some concealed weapon. But the constable invariably went upon his way, and Mill Lane was left unexplored.

Now and then—once, perhaps, in the course of each five minutes that went sluggishly by—Bendigo Bill crept out of the ditch, and crossing the lane, put his face close to the stout wooden bars of the tall nail-studded gate, and looked through into the great garden, amid the spreading vegetable beds of which the Dutchman's

cottage stood, with one solitary light shining pale in a window of it. These excursions took but a few seconds each, and there was one feature in them worthy of note, which was, that when the lurker outside pressed his face against the bars to gain a better view, the gate gave way to his touch; and yet that gate, with a bell-pull of rusty iron dangleings beside it, was always kept locked after dusk, and it had been locked on that very evening. But Bendigo Bill was accustomed to carry about with him instruments that could in case of need have triumphed over better locks than that of the nail-studded wooden gate.

The garrotter waited, but it was fretfully, and with a tension of the senses that kept him restless. His ears and eyes were sharpened as are those of the savage in his ambuscade. He changed his position again and again, stirring silently in his place of espial. He was armed—the frequency with which he thrust his hand beneath the folds of his outer garment, and the low clank of something hard and heavy, gave signs that such was the case; once, too, when a policeman passing the end of the lane had lingered longer

than common, Bendigo Bill's face had become even more sternly set than before, and the faint click of a pistol-lock had followed.

But there was something written in this desperado's brute face, over and above the bull-dog tenacity of purpose that made him so stanch a water-dog. A keen observer might have noted something like fear, and something like disgust or repugnance, stamped upon his coarse lineaments. He was a worse man than he had been when first he came, a cowed beast of prey, ready to lick the hand of its master, into his patron's service; but with all his hardihood and all his wickedness, he did not seem at ease now as he stood expectant.

For what did he wait? For something, plainly, by the twitching of his usually firm lips, that he half shrank from hearkening to. He had done his best, like a blind instrument, to bring the dreadful thing to pass, but he shrunk from it at the last, with a reluctance to know the inevitable worst. How long had he been at his post, since he had picked the lock of the gate, and since he had taken his place behind the willow, armed, and resolute to resist capture to

the death? Surely a long, long time. Time for a change of purpose, time for relenting, time for the discovery of unlooked-for obstacles. A long time. He passed the back of his horny hand across his dry lips, waiting, listening. Ah! the church clock, far away, striking the hour. He remembered what the time had been as he passed the lighted gin-palace before creeping into the lane. He had stood sentry some fifteen or twenty minutes, not more.

There it is at last! A cry, a long, harsh, horrid cry, eloquent of pain, and fear, and startled anguish, of a surprise worse than even bodily anguish—a dread sound for human ears to listen to. Silence after that one awful outcry of agonised despair—dead, dull, absolute silence. Bendigo Bill, scoundrel as he was, had shuddered when he heard that shriek rending the night-air; but the stillness that succeeded was more horrible than even the wild utterance of despairing terror that had died away upon his ear. His imagination, such as it was, was thoroughly awakened now, and he could picture to himself what it was that was going on in the solitary cottage, the one feeble light from which he could

see, when he bent his body forward as he then did, gazing into the great dark garden.

There was something in the picture that sickened him. A saving instinct in the man, knave and brute as he was, rose up in revolt at the thought of wickedness worse than he had ever nerved his callous heart and violent hand to do. Again he drew his sleeve across his dry white lips, and then passed it across his forehead, on which the heavy heat-drops stood. He gave a kind of groan. "I couldn't—no, I couldn't. Too bad for me, even!" he said in a low voice, unaware that he had uttered the words or merely thought them. Then he listened. His power of hearing was remarkable, and he had cultivated the gift, many a day, in the trackless Australian bush, when life and death were the stakes for which he played. He listened, now, less for a sound from the cottage in the garden, than for some noise that should denote that the neighbours had taken alarm, and that men were approaching the place whence that terrible cry had arisen. But it was a district in which quarrels and noisy broils were frequent, and no one seemed to have been

disturbed by that one piercing shriek, that had thrilled through the very marrow of the lurker keeping watch upon the gate.

Surely it was over now; surely there must be an end to the devil's work going on within that dwelling, from the one window of which the candle still threw the same pale glimmer. The silence weighed upon the bushranger's breast as a heavy stone might have done, had it been his fate to have lived a century or two earlier, and to be pressed to death in Newgate prison for refusing to plead. It must be over now.

No! Another cry, weak and broken, a stifled scream, that was so hollow and faint as to be likened to the shrieks we seem to hear in a dream, and then wake, and know that our senses have cheated us. The silence that succeeded was deep and long. Bendigo Bill watched and waited. He saw the light within the cottage-window pass rapidly across the casement and disappear; presently, a gleam from the upper windows, each in turn, showed that the candle had been carried up-stairs, and the light was no longer steady, but flickering and waving. At last it vanished. Every window was dark, and

the silence seemed to deepen as the light was extinguished.

Quite suddenly, there was a noise—a sound of some one walking quickly and breathing hard, as he came with heavy tread along the mould of the garden-paths. Then the white gate was pushed open, and the figure of a tall man dressed in dark clothing passed through into the lane. The gate, roughly swung open, fell with a slam against the post. Bendigo Bill stooped to pick up something that had lain at his feet in the ditch ready; it was a black oilskin bag, such as sailors carry when travelling ashore, and he thrust it under his arm, and stepped out into the middle of the horseway. The tall man who had passed through the gate spoke not a word; he made a quick imperious sign with his hand, and strode on, turning his back to the lights of the street. Bendigo Bill followed him without speaking.

Up the dark lane they went without a word being said on either side, without a sign, since that one imperative gesture which the ex-convict had obeyed. The tall man was in seafaring dress, as Bendigo Bill was, but there was

nothing of the sailor in his bearing. He walked very fast, with hasty and irregular steps, careless of the stones and the ruts of the ill-kept road. There was a crape-mask covering his face, but this he tore off, with a fierce snatch of his left hand, and thrust it into a pocket of the loose pilot-coat he wore. A white handkerchief was wrapped around his right hand, which hung at his side.

So much as this, Bendigo Bill, following as a dog follows his master, could make out by the faint starlight. But when they emerged from the lane into a suburban road, dotted here and there by dark shrubberies encircling white villas, a gas-lamp, burning near the corner of the lane, threw its glare upon the foremost of the two men, who turned away his face from his companion, as if by some instinct of concealment. "Your hand!" exclaimed the ex-bushranger, alarmed, for the white handkerchief was growing crimson, and down from it fell large drops of blood, that slaked the thirsty dust of the road. "How came it like that?" he added, coming closer.—"Curse you! she made her teeth meet in it: don't trouble me with questions," was the

savage answer. And the confederates pushed on, still in silence.

Soon the tall man fell back, with a gesture that Bendigo Bill understood to indicate that he, knowing the way best, should take the lead. He obeyed without speaking, and they climbed a hill skirting a high wall, over which waved the tall trees, as it seemed, of a park or pleasaunce, and presently were traversing an open waste of common ground, where the sandy road gleamed like a white ribbon amid stunted heath, and crisp turf and gorse in bloom. They were climbing another hill ere long, with plantations on either side, and suddenly they turned into a dark fir-wood, made their way into a thick and lonely clump of trees, and halted there.

Bendigo Bill unstrapped the bag which he carried, and laid it at the other's feet, and would have spoken, but an angry stamp of his companion's heel upon the ground, and a muttered oath, warned him to be mute. He sat down with his back to a tree, drew out his pipe, filled it, kindled it, and sat smoking his tobacco as stoically as if he had been still in the bush, or at the fireside in a shepherd's hut. The dark

figure, leaning against a tree opposite to him, remained as motionless for a long time as if it had been a mere effigy of a man.

It seemed to Bendigo Bill as if that night would never end. The unnatural silence, the strange conduct of his terrible companion, whose moods changed fitfully, sometimes impelling him to pace restlessly and aimlessly, like a hungry tiger, among the dusky fir-trees, over whose spreading roots his reckless feet stumbled unheeded, sometimes causing him to cast himself at length upon the bare earth, where he would lie, without motion, like a corpse : these were wild, weird adjuncts of the vigil beneath the fir-trees.

Day at last. The lazy clouds opened their eastern phalanx slowly, and reddish, uncertain tints began to colour the gray vapour, like a blush upon a guilty face, and objects that had been indistinct before, took shape, and became clearly defined. But Bendigo Bill still sat with his back against the tree, waiting the good pleasure of his patron. The light of early morning, cold and sad as the dawn is apt to be in our latitudes, presently showed him the tall figure and haggard beauty of the master whom

he served. Lord Ulswater was walking slowly towards him from among the thick growing fir-trees, dressed in a suit of his own clothes, taken from the bag which his follower had carried. He had wrapped a large piece of torn linen around his bleeding hand. He was fearfully pale, but his face was composed and his voice steady.

“Take these rags and burn them. Fire alone can hide such secrets,” said Lord Ulswater in his customary tone of command; and as he spoke, he threw down at Bendigo Bill’s feet, in a heap, the seaman’s attire that he had worn. “Are you a coward,” he added sneeringly, “that you tremble?” For Bendigo Bill, while hastily thrusting the cast-off disguise into his black bag, had been unable to repress a shudder and an exclamation at finding that large stains of clotted blood clung, dark and wet, to the garments he was handling. “I will keep my word,” said his patron sternly. “You shall have life and liberty, and cash to start you afresh in a part of the world where such as you can hardly starve. The ship sails for San Francisco on Saturday. I shall see you on

board, and not leave you till the anchor is up, and the bell rings for the shore. Be ready on Thursday at the place of which you spoke. I have the address. And be sure to burn that bundle you carry, ay, before you eat or drink this day."

Bendigo Bill nodded rather sullenly. "Ay, ay, my Lord," he said; and he stood long at the edge of the wood, watching the stately form of his patron as it lessened in the distance, and then, taking up his load, he tramped slowly away in an opposite direction to that taken by Lord Ulswater.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMING HOME.

LATE as it was in the autumn night when James Sark, accompanied by the Professor, reached the region of suburban market-gardens, in the outskirts of which lay his temporary home, he was surprised to see no light twinkling in any of the cottage-windows, a sign of wakefulness and of welcome that had never before been lacking. "And yet I should have thought the little woman would have been sitting up, waiting for us," said the Manxman, as he stood before the entrance to the garden: "she always did so before.—Mayhap she was tired out, poor lass," he added gently.

"The gate's open. Why? What's up now?" cried old Brum suspiciously. The lock's been sported. I can feel the box of the lock quite

loose, only hanging by a nail." And as he spoke, the gate yielded to his touch, opening easily.

With a sudden exclamation of alarm, Sark sprang forward. The Professor caught him by the arm. "Stay, Jem, stay!" he exclaimed; "it may be the traps, you know—the police. Don't run into a springe, with your eyes open, man. Your wife's in no danger, remember ——" But here Sark broke from the hold of his companion, and ran towards the dark, silent cottage. Old Brum followed, grumbling: "Goes into the net head-foremost," he muttered; for he really expected at every instant to see the apparition of shiny hats and blue uniforms from behind the Dutch gardener's house, and to witness the arrest of Sark as an escaped prisoner.

However, nothing of the kind occurred. The old man found his young comrade standing in front of the door in evident perplexity. "It's locked," said the Manxman, trying to laugh. "All right, and very careful, you see, but she's as quiet as a mouse. Can she be asleep? Loys, lass! Loys!" He raised his voice to a

higher pitch with each fresh summons, tapping smartly with his fingers on the closed door. But he called in vain; there was no answer. "Gone out," pronounced Sark, in a voice that he could not render calm and cheerful, as he wished it to be: "I was an ass not to think of that before. Gone to London, perhaps, to hunt after me, or to the railway station to meet us, and missed us somehow; eh, Professor?"

"You wait! you wait! we'll have a light directly, we will," said Brum hurriedly. He groped, as he spoke, behind some empty casks that stood, like a row of Morgiana's oil-jars, under the lee of the outbuildings, and produced a common stable-lantern and a smaller one, such as constables carry. Then he opened them, kindled a match, and lighted both lanterns. The black mould of the garden-path, mottled with green moss, and the nearest beds of vegetables, growing in regular ranks, like soldiers on parade, and the wall of the wooden house, and the quaint porch, were revealed.

"Catch a weasel asleep!" chuckled the Professor; "catch old Brum napping. I thought these might turn out useful one day. Now,

Jem, we can see the footprints in the soft mould, and——Why, what ails you?" For the old man, chattering thus, had caught a glimpse of his friend's face, and he wondered to see Sark, pale and ghastly with dread, staring with starting eyeballs at something on the ground—on the ground, and on the damp, sunken flagstone before the door—something dark, and wet, and tortuous, that crept, snake-like, out from beneath the shrunken wood-work of the door itself, and crawled across the threshold and the stone, and formed a tiny blackening pool amid the moss beyond.

"Look!" cried James Sark—"look!" and he clutched the other by the arm, and leaned heavily upon him, in the shock of that first discovery, as if his limbs had lost their vigour—"look at that, old man!"

Old Brum looked down, shuddering. "Blood! and nothing else," he said with a gasp.—"Stay," he added, as his foot struck against something hard and metallic, and he stooped to pick up the key of the door, dropped, no doubt, by the person who had last left the house—"stay one moment; best let me go in first."

But Sark, who had recovered from the first terrible surprise, took the key from the old man's hand, and opened the door. He had tried to nerve himself, to harden himself against the sight that he guessed but too truly would await him within. But the reality of the horror within surpassed even his fearful forebodings of the worst. There, in the passage, at the foot of the stairs, lay Loys, dead—murdered. She lay upon the brick floor, with her head resting against the wall opposite to the door of the little parlour; and her white upturned face, with the eyes wide open, a frown upon the brow, and the lips apart, so as to show the teeth between them, was rigid as that of a marble statue, expressive of such fear, and hate, and agony as never sculptor moulded. All her beautiful black hair was loose and streaming over her shoulders, tangled and torn as it had been in the hideous struggle, the signs of which were every where.

She was not a woman to die unresisting, and she had fought long for her life, as might plainly be seen. She had dragged herself on her knees, so it seemed, thus far, and there died; for both her arms were outstretched, as if

to keep back the murderer, and her arms were cut and bruised, and the fingers of one hand had been nearly severed, evidently in an effort to grasp the weapon with which the death-blow had been dealt. That weapon must have been sharp and two-edged, a dagger or heavy sheath-knife, to have inflicted those deep wounds in neck and bosom that had been dealt, again and again, enough to let out more lives, it might have been thought, than that one poor life that the woman who lay there had so desperately striven to defend.

The first blow must have been struck within the parlour to the right of the door, for there the chairs had been overturned, the table pushed aside, and the work-box lay on the floor, the bright-coloured skeins of silk and the other feminine gear that had filled it, scattered about, and soaked in the blood that was everywhere.

For it was everywhere, that damning proof of cruel crime, as ruthlessly done as treacherously planned. There were splashes and spots of the guilty crimson high upon the walls, on the furniture, on the frayed carpet, everywhere—most of all in the passage without, where Loys

lay. There, too, on the white door-jamb, was the distinct imprint of a gory hand. As the two men stood, mute with terror and pity, they shuddered afresh to feel that the floor on which their feet rested was slippery to the tread. Sark fell on his knees, and took the helpless head gently up, laying it on his breast. "Brum, old man, get help; for God's sake, a doctor. There may be life in her; go!" And he began to speak, half distractedly, to the dead, calling her by every fond and loving name that he had ever used to her, and begging her to speak and live, for the sake of the great love with which he had loved her.

The Professor went hurrying off, obeying, in the excitement of the moment, without remonstrance; and yet he knew that hope was past, and that all had been over long since; but it was a relief to do something, anything. So Brum hastened off along Aboukir Street, quiet enough now, and did as his friend had bidden him. He came back, not running, but walking very fast. "I have called up a doctor," he said hurriedly; "he'll be here very soon. But, poor chap, you know it's no good; I see you

do." James Sark, with his dead wife's head pillowed on his breast, looked up at him with bloodshot tearless eyes; then he lifted her right hand, the one that had been wounded, and eyed it piteously.

"Look, Brum," he said—"look how the butcher has left my darling! You remember her pretty hand, so little and white—a lady's hand, you know, I used to call it. Loys was proud of it. O look, look here!" And he pressed the cold fingers to his lips, kissing them passionately, and then broke out into such an agony of sobs and tears as very few have ever witnessed, and fewer still, thank heaven, have endured. Then old Brum, moved and frightened, rascal as he was, broke down, and began to cry, whiningly, like a worn-out hound that sees his master in distress.

But the Professor's mood soon changed, as a thought struck him. "My poor old Jem, old chap, you must come away," he said earnestly; "she's dead, poor thing. You know that. Doctors! all the doctors in London couldn't help her; and I was a fool to raise an alarm, and bring a lot of people here, for unless you make

tracks, you'll be taken." There was no reply. "Don't you hear me?" cried the Professor, shaking Sark by the arm.

The Manxman looked up. "Let them take me. I've nothing to live for now. If they've the heart to take a man away from the side of the only thing he ever loved, lying dead like this, why, let them handcuff me, and drag me off. Save yourself, and let me be." These words were spoken with dogged, hopeless resolve.

"Jem, Jem! hear reason! it'll be too late soon," urged the Professor; but his words fell on heedless ears. The old coiner was sorely puzzled. His natural shrewdness told him that ordinary arguments, commonplace appeals to the instinct of self-preservation, would be thrown away upon that desperate man, blind and deaf to all things but the frenzy of his sorrow; and yet to abandon him to his fate, with the certainty of detention, recognition, and punishment before him, was not to be thought of. "After all," soliloquised Brum, "they've nothing much agin me. No warrants out. I've no call to run from the Philistines just now." Thus reassured

as to his own safety, the Professor, lantern in hand, took a survey of the apartment, and then, shaking his head, went up-stairs. It was evident by the drops of blood that were frequent on the carpetless stairs, that the assassin had ascended to the upper floor. Above, all the doors were open, and everything was in disorder, the cupboards having been rifled, the lids of trunks and chests violently wrenched from the hold of lock or hinges, whichever had been the first to yield to the murderer's hasty attack.

That the assassin had been in great haste was plain, not only because the clothes and other objects which the now emptied boxes and closets had contained lay in a tumbled heap, tossed into the middle of the floor, and in many cases smeared with half-dried blood, but because, in prizing open one stout oaken sea-chest, the tool employed had been snapped in two, and part of it remained lying close to the box, the cover of which had manifestly been torn away by main force. Brum picked up the fragment of steel, which was about four inches long, and was apparently part of the blade of a large sharp-pointed knife, double-edged, and with a thick

blade, such as German hunters and American backwoodsmen carry.

Either the murderer desired to mislead suspicion by feigning to have perpetrated his crime from motives of vulgar greed, or he had been hurriedly searching for something worth the taking; and that this was not money or money's worth was proved by the fact, that several gold and silver coins with sundry trinkets, the property of poor Loys, lay strewed about the floor disregarded. "No regular cracksman would have left 'em, that's certain," grumbled Brum. It was clear to his judgment that the search after some desired object had been a real one, although executed with the fiercest haste, and very roughly. On a chest of drawers stood a basin half full of water, with a towel left lying across it, as when the assassin had washed the red stains from his hands, and turned to go.

"If he's the man I take him to be," said old Brum, with another shake of his sagacious head, "he's been looking for papers, letters, or what not; and he hasn't found 'em, for see here!" And the Professor pounced upon a thick little packet of letters, with something in the middle

of it harder and weightier than letters, tied up with a piece of faded scarlet ribbon. This he slipped into his pocket. All this time he had been listening, with his head on one side, in the old raven-like fashion, for the sound of coming footsteps. His inspection of the rooms, minute as it was, had been very rapidly conducted, for Brum had always before his eyes the ideal picture of his ally, James Sark, with chained wrists, dragged away by the inevitable police. "All my cursed folly!" groaned the Professor; "I ought to have known better than to have gone blabbing to that doctor and his gabbling, screeching maid-servants, about a murder in Mill Lane. It's known up at the station by this!" And at the recollection of his own imprudent words, Brum groaned again and went down-stairs.

There was James Sark, immovable, in the same position as before, holding up that passive head, that lay so heavily on his patient shoulder, and uttering low broken words of fondness, such as a mother might whisper to her dying child that she cannot bring herself to believe is to go from her. "He's mazed-like, poor lad! no use

my speaking sense to him now," muttered his old associate: "the game's up!" At that moment, the Professor's quick eye detected a glittering object on the floor, half hidden by the worn door-mat, and the Professor darted at it as a cat at a mouse. Yes; he was right. Here was proof positive, confirming what he had all along suspected; better than that, here was a talisman to rouse James Sark from his fatal stupor of inaction.

"Dear boy Jem!" said Brum, more urgent than before; "get up, and be a man! She's dead, poor soul; but the butcherly villain—he that did this cruelty—he's alive. Get up, man, if you wouldn't lose your revenge along with your liberty."

* He had touched the right chord now. The Manxman looked up eagerly, and his face, pallid almost as that of the dead within his arms, flushed wrathfully. As quickly did a look of weary discouragement succeed to this glow of anger. "How am I to find him? I don't know who did this. Let me be, Brum!" he answered, in a dull peevish tone, like that of some sick man disturbed in his first sleep.

“Now, Jem!” cried the old man, trembling with impatience, as his watchful ear distinguished a distant sound, distant yet, but approaching; “once more, say I, be a man! Look—look at this I’ve found on the floor, almost on the very spot where she lies so quiet, poor creature. Look, I say!”

Thus adjured James Sark did look at the shining object which Brum held out for his inspection. It was a large flat gold button, part, evidently, of a sleeve-link, broken, no doubt, in the struggle, and which must have dropped from the murderer’s wrist, and lain unnoticed by him. A handsome and costly toy of its class, for it was studded with small turquoises disposed in the form of a cross, and a coronet was engraved upon it. “That’s enough proof, ain’t it——” Brum was beginning, when the Manxman sprung to his feet, gently laying down upon the ground the poor passive head that he had supported on his strong arm. “I see,” he cried. “I’m ready. I was struck stupid for a minute; but I *have* something to live for—to settle scores with that Right Honourable villain. I’m ready.”

There was something startling in the sudden change that had metamorphosed this man, usually so genial and easy-tempered. There he stood, pale and stern, with blazing eyes and nostrils that dilated like those of a stag at bay, the very incarnation of vengeance. "Then come! I hear footsteps and people talking," answered the Professor, grasping his companion's wrist.

The Manxman stooped, and kissed his wife's cold lips again and again. "Good-bye, Loys, good-bye, my dear," he murmured, and then, with a great sob, turned towards the door. The noise of people speaking loudly, and of tramping feet, was now very distinct.

"Come, lad," said Brum, in serious alarm; "you'll be too late." And he almost dragged the young man through the passage and out into the garden, where several persons were already dimly discernible, stumbling as they groped their way, and talking excitedly. The Professor's keen glance caught the dreaded glare of bull's-eye lanterns coming up the lane. By main force, he drew his associate behind the angle of the cottage, and urged him on. "The

house is between us and them, but the police are at the gate. They can't see us. We must get over the wall, I tell you. I'm old, but if you help me, I can manage to do it," gasped the Professor, hurrying along the path that led in an opposite direction to that from which the intruders were advancing. "Be quick and silent, for your life!"

As they reached the wall, they heard a loud shout. The crowd had entered the house by this time, and the outcry was caused, no doubt, by the discovery of the body. Sark, with one hand on the top of the low wall, hesitated; "My poor Loys! my poor Loys!" he groaned out piteously. "It seems cowardly to leave her to strangers. I can't bear it!" But Brum spoke quick and forcible words, pointing out the fact, that Sark's incarceration would render him powerless against the murderer; that he might even be accused of the crime, since a runaway convict was always considered capable of any atrocious act, and that his best hope of exacting retribution for his wife's cruel death was to be founded on his own exertions in hunting the assassin down. "Ay, hunt him down! So I

will. Be sure of that, old man," said Sark, grimly. Brum had heard many a threat of vengeance before, coupled with grisly oaths and frightful curses, but never such a cool, deliberate menace, spoken in the calm plain words of a man whose mind was bent upon one purpose, and who scorned the imprecations of vulgar rage as empty babblings unworthy of a thought. He felt sure that Sark would keep his word. Then, thanks to the Manxman's strength and activity, the wall was quickly scaled, and across gardens and fields the two associates made their way unpursued, till they reached the broad highway that led them to London.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEPOSITION OF BENJAMIN HULLER.

I, BENJAMIN HULLER, seventy-one years of age, a native of the parish of Shellton, and a pauper in the Union workhouse there, do declare and solemnly affirm on oath that this my deposition and confession is a true and full statement of facts known to me. I have stated these facts freely, without fee or reward, or' malice or favour to any one concerned, as I hope for mercy to my wretched soul; and although dying in hospital, and, as I believe, at the last extremity, I am certain that my mind is clear, and that the circumstances I have related, and which have been taken down in writing in my presence, and signed by me, did in very truth occur in order as they are set down. And this confession I have made in hopes that, by

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means of it, I may make some reparation for the wicked wrong in doing which I have had a share, of which I declare that I do now most heartily repent. And I have begged the gentlemen that this deposition might be taken down as nearly as possible in my own words, which request has been kindly permitted.

I was a man who had received a good education, but going wrong, through my own fault, as I now humbly acknowledge, in spite of kind friends and employers, I led a checkered life of much sin and sorrow, and after many ups and downs in the world, became a pauper in the workhouse of my native place. There, notwithstanding my bad character and bad habits, my superior address and information—superior, I mean, to those of my fellow-paupers—caused me to be set in some little authority within the walls of the workhouse, and I have been wardman, labour-master, and other things, each time being deprived of the post which I held in consequence of my addiction to drink and other misconduct.

At this present moment, I am deputy-porter of the Union, but at the time of which I speak

I was only the keeper or guardian of the dead-house, a duty which I got by currying favour with the master, as I generally contrived to do when not in liquor, and by holding which I got an allowance of beer and other indulgences. My being keeper of the dead-house was well known to the workhouse doctor, Dr. Dennis, a gentleman against whom I have nothing at all to say, except that he neglected the office of attending the Union patients more than was, perhaps, quite right in him, turning them over to his assistant, Mr. Marsh.

This Mr. Stephen Marsh, the same who was taken dead out of the river Thames quite lately, was a very clever young man, but of intemperate habits and a bad disposition. He was in needy circumstances, very envious, and desirous to rise in life, but not industriously inclined; so he was always on the look-out for some chance of growing suddenly rich. He noticed me, as a man different from the ordinary paupers, since I had travelled, and read books, and seen better days, and we had many a chat together.

One day, this Mr. Stephen Marsh came to me, asking, in a joking sort of manner, if I

would trouble myself to pick up a ten-pound note if I found it lying in my way, and if I thought it would be a pleasant change to discharge myself from Shellton workhouse, and go and amuse myself in London with money in my pockets. I thought he was in jest at first; but from hints he dropped that some business was afoot by which a lot of cash was to be made, easily and without risk, I found that he was in earnest. He sounded me as to my inclinations, and soon satisfied himself that I was ready, and too ready, to take a safe part in any plot whatever, if a plot were brewing, provided it were made worth my while.

Two days afterwards, Mr. Marsh came again, and this time he spoke more to the purpose. It seemed there was a party in the background that wanted, for a particular reason, to be put secretly in possession of a child's dead body. More than that, it must be that of a boy, of not more than four or five years of age, and must be a fair-haired child. It was not for dissection, or anything of that sort, or Mr. Marsh would have had no call to be so careful and mysterious about it, because Dr. Dennis had but to speak

to the master, and pay a trifle, perhaps ten shillings, compensation, for consent of parents or relations, and there would have been no difficulty at all. But this was all to be kept as still as the grave itself.

Have I said that I was to get ten pounds for my assistance in the matter? I was offered ten pounds, and I got a bit frightened at the high price. Nothing for nothing had been the sort of rule I was used to, and I began to be afraid when I found the tariff such a handsome one. Besides, how was I to earn it? I was keeper of the dead-house, where the bodies of those that died in the infirmary or the casual ward, or where not, were placed before burial; but ours was only a little bit of a Union, and deaths did not occur so frequently as in city workhouses. I might wait a long time before there came under my care such a dead child as was demanded.

On mentioning this to Mr. Marsh, he looked at me in a queer, sidelong sort of way, and asked me, had I not been in the infirmary lately. So I replied that I had, that very day. Then, he said, most probably I had observed a little

boy, that was ill there of the fever, a child of exactly the age, size, and complexion that he had been inquiring after. This little creature was without father or mother, or any near relations. His parents, whom some said were North of Ireland people, and others took them for Welsh folks, had gone about the country, haymaking and hop-picking, and working at odd jobs between the early mowing and the last of the harvest, and they had taken the fever in the strip of marshy sheep-pasture down between Gridley Harbour and the sea, and both died of it, the man in some shed or barn, and the wife in the workhouse. When the poor woman was brought in, she was too far gone to state name or parish, and she merely lifted her finger once, and pointed to the west, when asked by the master where she came from. So, as the boy merely knew that his Christian name was Paul, they gave him in the workhouse books the surname of West, seeing they had no clue to his settlement, and so had to keep him, and he was set down in black and white as Paul West.

But after a little while, he was ill of the fever too, having most likely brought the seeds of it

with him from the wet meadows, where there was sad sickness that year. He was a pretty little chap, blue-eyed, and with light curling hair, almost gold colour. So the young doctor reminded me of little Paul West. "But he'll get well, doctor," said I, astonished; "he is just the child to live to be as old as any of us." Mr. Marsh gave a nasty sort of little laugh. "I'm sure," said he, "that the boy will not recover." I stared at him, and he looked rather ashamed; but he went away, and came back that very evening to invite me to take a glass at a public hard by. It was the first time he ever offered me anything of the sort, and I thought it odd that he should sit down with an old pauper scamp like myself, but I never could resist drink. I went.

Over the gin and water, in a private parlour of the *Fishers* public, the whole thing was settled. He—Mr. Marsh—persisted that the boy West would die of the fever. My share in the business was marked out beforehand. You know, gentlemen, how loosely and carelessly they manage in workhouses about everything to do with the sick pauper, from the first drink of

physic he gets, right or wrong, late or early, as the nurse is drowsy or not, down to when they lay him out in a shed before the coffin comes. In the case of little West, I was to contrive, as I easily could, to get an empty coffin buried; not exactly empty, but weighted with earth to near the proper weight, and filled up with straw or rags, to prevent the earth from rattling. I could do this by screwing on the lid myself, the contractor often bringing the shell after working-hours, and his men being willing to accept a pint or so of beer from me or any one, and not at all inquisitive as to my reason for preferring to borrow a screw-driver, and finish the job myself.

Thus, as may be seen, it was easy for me to get the coffin buried without the boy, and not difficult to put the poor little child's body into the possession of the surgeon's assistant. But two things puzzled me. First, for what was the body required? Secondly, how came the doctor to be so confident that the boy Paul would not live? Because it so happened that I had heard one of the women up-stairs say that he was getting on famously, and would soon be well—a bad bargain for the guardians, as she

said in joke. As for the first question, after very much beating about the bush, and finding I would not move blindfold in the matter, Mr. Marsh told me several things. He has let drop plenty of other hints since, and altogether, first and last, I learned from him that a great gentleman wanted the dead child to pass off for another child of the same age, that stood between him and a large property; also that a nurse in this gentleman's interest was ready to effect the substitution. As for my second question, the young surgeon laughed again, in that same sneering way as before, and bade me mind my own business.

I agreed to do what was required of me for the sum of twelve pounds, half in advance; but afterwards I demanded to be paid twenty pounds more. This—God forgive me!—was not on account of the wrongful act I had agreed to partake in, but simply for fear of legal punishment. I did as the surgeon bade me, and asked no further questions; but I thought the matter over, and decided that the other child, the heir to the property, was to be put out of the way—I mean by death. But I com-

forted myself by thinking that I had no art or part in whatever else was done, but had merely to carry out the deception as the doctor desired.

I was not very much surprised when the wardsman of the infirmary came one day to tell me that little Paul West had died that morning, and had been laid out, and to call me to help to carry the poor child's body down to the dead-house. There was to be no inquest, because the doctor had taken his rounds earlier than usual that day, and had certified to the cause of death. I asked which doctor, Dennis or Marsh, and I was told Marsh. I fear, very much I do fear, that the poor child met with foul play, and that Stephen Marsh went to his account with the crime of cutting short that innocent life upon his sinful soul. I remember once, when he was flurried and heated with liquor (to which he took greatly after leaving Dr. Dennis and setting up to practise as an independent doctor) — I remember he said that Burke and Hare were clever dogs; but that when a "subject" was wanted there were better ways of getting it than by clapping a pitch-

plaster over the mouth; and much more talk of that sort, which I never liked to listen to.

I am getting weak with so much speaking, and I must make my story as short as I can, so it can be understood. That very evening, then, about sundown, the child's body was smuggled out of the shed that we called the dead-house, and out through a side-door that led from the workhouse yard into a lane called Sharland's Lane, leading to the tanneries and bleaching-works at the back of the town. The key of this side-door, which was seldom used, I obtained by purloining it from the master's office, where it hung on a nail. Mr. Marsh was there, ready with a carriage—it was a phaeton, a one-horse carriage, hired from the *Bell Hotel*; and he drove it himself, and was alone. We put our load, which was but a light one, wrapped in a cloak belonging to the doctor, beneath the apron of the trap, and Mr. Marsh drove off with it—first paying me the sum stipulated for. And that is all I know of my own knowledge; only that on that very night my Lord's little son, a child of the age of Paul West, died up at St. Pagans Abbey, as was given out—Dr. Dennis

and his assistant, Mr. Marsh, attending him in his illness.

I managed the mock-burial cleverly, so as to avoid suspicion; and the coffin, should it be examined, will be found to contain no remains of little West, or any one else, but exactly what I have said—earth, and rags, and straw. I discharged myself from the Union, going up to London with my ill-got money, in hopes to get a small partnership share in a grog-shop at Rotherhithe, the owner of which was known to me, and to whom I proposed to act as barman and book-keeper, since he could not read or write, though a moneyed man. But I found the place bespoke by a party with more funds; and mine soon went in drink and gambling at cards, at which I was cheated by sharpers, being hocused, and losing ten pounds at one sitting. The end of it was, that I came back to the workhouse again, and was a pauper once more.

At different times, I got small extra sums of money out of Mr. Marsh, who had set up in a grand house at Shellton to be a doctor on his own account, no doubt with the cash paid him for his services in that affair. But all Shellton

cried out against him for his ingratitude to Dr. Dennis, his old employer ; and as his temper and habits were none of the best, and he was addicted to drink, he was soon a by-word in the town, and his affairs went from bad to worse. Being idle and poor, he was always grumbling against the person who had hired him to tempt me in that bad business of the false burial and substitution ; and from what he let slip, I made out that it was the Honourable John Carnac that was the contriver of the wicked plot, and that, by underhand means, he made away with his young nephew, son of the late Lord Ulswater, at St. Pagans, who died soon after, it was said of a broken heart, poor gentleman, being so grieved by the loss of the child.

I declare that, to the best of my belief, the body buried as that of the late Lord Ulswater's only son and heir was really that of Paul West, the orphan ; and that my Lord's son was taken away out of the abbey by night, and most likely made away with by the nurse or the doctor, Marsh, by desire of his uncle, Mr. Carnac, who is now Lord Ulswater. I am sure Mr. Carnac paid Marsh a good deal of money,

though not so much as he wanted ; and Marsh and I, and my son, William Huller, made plans to obtain more money from my Lord, and threatened to tell all unless he complied with our demands. My son William afterwards betrayed us, and went over to Lord Ulswater's side ; and then Mr. Marsh was murdered when about this very business ; and I, suspecting my Lord to have had a hand in the doctor's dreadful ending, came up to London to find out something about it, by help of old chums, and was run over in the streets, and taken to hospital, where, being mortally injured, and feeling my time will now be very short, I wish to make some atonement for my ill-spent and evil life by confessing what may enable justice to be done.

One thing more. The nurse, I never saw—meaning the nurse who attended on the late Lord's young son—but her name I understood to have been Fletcher, and she was a young woman, married, as I believe, to an emigrant or seafaring man, whom she afterwards joined in foreign parts. She has lately been seen in London ; and it was to meet her, and gain her over to our side against Lord Ulswater, that

Marsh made his last miserable journey to London. This is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, gentlemen, and I have signed it, and swear to it.

There, in its naked horror, is the tale as told by Benjamin Huller, lying on his dying bed in the Accident Ward of the hospital, whither he had been carried. To whom it was related, and by what agency it was brought about that this formal deposition was regularly taken down from the wretched old man's lips, word for word, in the presence of a magistrate, will be explained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

INVOKES THE LAW.

WHEN Sark, escaping from the house among the market-gardens, and with the smart and anguish of his grief fresh upon him, reached London, he was in a state of mind that made him dangerous indeed. But for the Professor's company and counsels, there is little doubt that he would have disregarded all thoughts of his own safety in the thirst for revenge that tormented him as the physical longing for water maddens the shipwrecked wretch, floating, in some foundered vessel's boat, over dreary leagues of brine. His first passionate wish was to go down to St. Pagans, and, with his own hands, to wreak his bitter vengeance on the man whom he accused as his wife's murderer.

It cost the Professor infinite trouble to

moderate and guide this fierce desire for retribution on the guilty head of him to whom suspicion pointed, and it was only after long and frequent discussions that Sark was induced to submit to the calmer advice of his aged associate.

"You see, Jem, my lad, by attacking him straight face to face, as a dog flies at a bull, you give him all the advantage—you do indeed," urged this old Ulysses of London rascality. "Put it at the best, and say you kill him——"

"And I would kill him," interrupted Sark, with a glittering eye and a compression of the lips that boded no good.

But Brum went on smoothly: "Say you kill him, they hang you for it, Jem. I know what your looks mean. They are welcome, says you. Poor chap, I believe you. But you'd find it main bad work in jail, waiting to be tried, with the chaplain at your elbow, and the remembrance that you let your enemy get a victory after all—two lives for one. Then put it this way: you shoot at him, or stab at him, and don't get the best of it—I tell you I've heard he's wonderful strong, and as bold as a

lion ; I've set eyes on him too, and I believe he's the man they make him out—you get him, or you get penal servitude for life, and where are you then? No, no ; I've a trick worth two of the knife-and-pistol game." And by degrees, old Brum developed his strategy. Little by little, he brought the Manxman round to his way of thinking ; but it was as hard at first to wean the latter from his direct plan of a personal revenge as to restrain a half-tamed jaguar from carnage. The Professor pointed out with considerable force that a much more subtle and complete vengeance might be taken upon Lord Ulswater by the employment of legal means, than by any rash and crude effort to exact a penalty for the crime which lay at his door. " Bring him to book for that other business," advised the wary Professor : " prove against him that he robbed his brother's son of name and property, and did his best to take his life too. Get him tried and convicted, and turn him out a beggar, no Lord Ulswater any more, but John Carnac ; a sentenced prisoner, with all England crying shame upon him ; and then, if that don't break his spirit, why, take your own

course, Jem, my man. Safer and easier, I reckon, for you to get into the same gang with a convict at Portland or Bermuda, and settle scores some dark night, than to go hot-foot down to St. Pagans, to play your life agin his."

This reasoning prevailed. Without relinquishing his ultimate resolve to exact a life for a life, Sark was brought to see how incomplete would be a measure of retaliation that should leave his foe, at the worst, exempt from all the tortures of public ignominy and a public denunciation. The Manxman's educated mind was sufficiently cultured to enable it to realise the truth, that mental pains surpass in poignancy all that the coarser physical agencies can inflict upon the body. He determined that the destroyer of Loys, the usurper of the Ulswater title, should drink of the cup of shame, and be cast down headlong from the high place he held before the world.

But the difficulties in the way of this æsthetic vengeance were not light or few. The murder in Mill Lane, following so closely on that of Mr. Marsh, had caused an unwonted amount of excitement in London, the rather that in both

cases the motive of crime seemed some mysterious reason that set curiosity agape. There were sensation paragraphs and even sensation leading articles in the London newspapers. The Home Office caused bills offering a reward and a free pardon to any accomplice who would turn Queen's evidence, to be posted on the walls, far and near, and the police, taunted by the press for their inactivity, did their best to redeem their reputation for zeal and adroitness.

Brum and Sark, in their refuge, one of those fox-earths, so to speak, of which the veteran coiner had always a choice accessible to him, and which lay in a recondite part of Southwark, felt themselves anything but secure. Indeed placards, topped by the royal arms, were already inviting attention, on a dead-wall hard by, to the reward of fifty pounds offered for the apprehension of the Professor himself, some of whose many aliases were enumerated, and who was known to be the late tenant-in-chief of the wooden house where the murdered woman's body had been discovered. The licensed victualler, to whose friendship Brum had owed

the loan of the cottage, had not pushed his goodwill so far as to risk his licence by refusing information to the police, and the hunt was hot for the old man in every thieves' quarter of the metropolis. Other posters offered a like recompense for the capture of William Huller, otherwise Bendigo Bill, suspected of being the author of both crimes. Sergeant Sharples, that detective who had met the ex-bushranger at the railway terminus on the very night of the murder beside the river, and who had commented on the man's confused manner and bruised face, had made his report to his superiors, and hence the name of Bendigo Bill was set down in the list of those who were "wanted," according to the technical phraseology of Scotland Yard.

At this pinch, strangely enough, it was less perilous for Sark, runaway prisoner as he was, to traverse London streets than for the old Professor, against whom justice had nothing at that time to allege, save only his imaginary participation in the late murder, to stir abroad. No staring black capitals, with the royal lion and unicorn emblazoned above them, coupled Sark's name with the temptation of a reward for

his seizure. He was not on the latest list of the "wanted," that *Index Expurgatorius* of the police. However, if the Professor's person was pretty closely cabined in that coiner's haunt in Westminster (where the privileged rogues of a more superstitious age had found securer sanctuary) to which he had conducted Sark on the night of their hairbreadth escape among the market-gardens, his busy, plotting brain was more active than ever. He knew well enough that the Manxman, or rather the unknown husband of the woman found dead, would infallibly be taxed by popular suspicion as the murderer; and that such indeed was the case, was soon proved by the tone of the newspapers. The penny dailies, and some papers priced more highly than a penny, literally gloated over the atrocity of the act, and drew fancy portraits of the missing criminal, together with ingenious speculations as to the motives of his wickedness, some of which evinced immense psychological knowledge of the Rochefoucauld order.

It was necessary that one of the two men should venture out and hold some communication with the outer world, and this duty could

best be discharged by Sark. The plan of operations was of old Brum's device, and it had the merit of combining boldness with caution.

"We must have a lawyer on our side, Jem ; can't do nothing without one," the Professor had pronounced *ex cathedrâ* ; and Brum was able to point out the very lawyer to serve their turn.

It appeared that the cunning old man, always apprehensive of a prosecution at the instance of the authorities of the Royal Mint or of the Governor and Company managing the affairs of that Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, with whose autographs he was wont to take such unwarrantable freedom, had long been on the look-out for a solicitor to conduct his defence successfully. He objected to Mr. N. Moss and the like, regular Old Bailey practitioners. Brum was sharp enough to see that a prejudice existed against the clients of these notorious champions of persecuted guilt, and that if many got off unpunished, many fell victims to a jury's incredulity as to the fact of a chronic conspiracy on the part of witnesses to swear away the liberty of all those low-browed, heavy-jowled,

down-looking innocents who figured successively in the dock.

Brum had contrived, therefore, to establish a sort of half-acknowledged business connection with a firm of another grade, Greer and Starriker, whose handsome offices lie within half a minute's walk of Chancery Lane. Mr. Greer, the senior partner, knew the law as well as an attorney needs to know it, and the human heart still better than the law. He had been for years confidential clerk, at a high salary, to Messrs. Castles and Taping, whose titled clients were Legion, and among whose japanned deed-boxes were those that displayed the name of the Right Honourable Lord Ulswater.

Queer stories were whispered, among the rank and file of the famous Inns of Court regiment of Volunteers, as to the reason of Greer's abrupt departure from the office of Castles and Taping. Some said that he had divulged the contents of a will, while others whispered that he had gone so far as to amend that document, by introducing glosses and variations extremely distasteful to the testator, whose heir-at-law was at daggers drawn with his grandfather who made the will,

the said heir and George Greer being remarked to be "as thick as thieves," as it was forcibly put, at about the period of the supposed interpolation. It was added, that Mr. Greer was too deep in the secrets of the firm and its clients to make it safe to get rid of him in any other way than by making him a present of his articles, according to a former promise, and bowing him civilly out of the family solicitors' green baize inner doors.

Greer took to himself as a partner another attorney, Starriker, who had money, and who was good at the manipulation of witnesses, but such an incorrigibly vulgar dog as to disgust fastidious litigants. The good address that he had not, his partner possessed. Mr. Greer was a tall, presentable person, with white hands, a smooth face and tongue, and a grave, polished manner. He could be stern when he chose, but he was never coarse; whereas Starriker was a mere buffoon, to whom the free-and-easy club he belonged to was as the *Mermaid* to Ben Jonson and Shakspeare. The firm thrived. Greer and Starriker were great at righting the wrongs of the injured butler, out of place because

the bins of old port emptied themselves with mysterious celerity, or discharged as unable to explain a defalcation among the table-spoons. To them came the cook whose late mistress had declined to attest her sobriety ; the coachman indignant at the meanness that would blame him because horses were lean and corn-chest void ; the lady's-maid whom the magistrate had refused to commit for lack of sufficiently direct evidence to connect Matilda Lighthand with the lost brooch and missing earrings ; and who one and all now sought reparation of a damaged character from their country's courts, or money.

Greer and Starriker got them money. The threat of an action for libel is very potent with the laziest and most timorous of all classes, with which Mr. Greer mainly had to negotiate. They were his milch cows, these bewigged old ladies, these dowagers in lozenged chariots, these Indian officers, well-to-do spinsters, Irish absentee landlords, and miscellaneous fundholders, from whose terrors and indolence he wrung hush-money, and smart-money, and black-mail in all its branches. They all feared the law, feared a bill of costs, feared the abuse of the

penny dailies, feared the exposure of a public court, and the browbeating of a barrister. The number of actions which Mr. Greer compromised, as compared with those which fairly came before a jury, must have been very great.

Not confining their business to this one line, the firm consented to take charge of the lighter and more elegant varieties of criminal prosecutions—for fraud and forgery, and so forth. They were known in the Divorce Court, too, where the late Sir Cresswell Cresswell was said to shake his head as meaningly as Lord Burleigh in the *Critic*, on seeing the names of Greer and Starriker as solicitors for the petitioner. It was to this precious pair, legal harpies, to whom the law appeared only as a convenient engine for extortion, that Brum appealed in his distress.

Greer and Starriker received James Sark, when he came to them, furnished with a letter from the Professor by way of introduction, very well indeed. All was grist that came to their professional mill; and in this case they saw the prospect of profit and celebrity, whatever might be the end of it.

“Good for a couple of thousand, I should say,

and a capital advertisement into the bargain!" Mr. Greer had whispered to Mr. Starriker as he pushed him, with friendly promptitude, out of the room where the interview took place. The senior of the firm had sharp eyes, and he saw that his partner's redfaced jocularity jarred on the visitor's mind and temper.

Mr. Greer took the matter up at once. The sound of Lord Ulswater's title decided him. It was worth a little trouble and risk of costs out of pocket to hook such a leviathan as that. "I'll get him under my thumb, and a precious dance I'll lead him," was the attorney's first thought, his mind running, as usual, in the old grooves. But presently he began to see that Sark was savagely in earnest. Compromises and cash payments were out of the question in this instance, even had the law permitted such brokerage to be applied to so ticklish a subject as the first and weightiest of the four pleas of the crown. But in any case there must be gain, and perhaps glory, to be got out of the dexterous management of such a cause. Two, if not three, capital accusations against a peer of the realm, involving the changing hands of a fair estate and

a noble title, were alluring enough to such a practitioner as Mr. Greer; but to bring to grief a client of his old masters, Castles and Taping, and thus constructively to fling a legal bomb or hand-grenade into the office of that decorous firm, that was indeed a sweet morsel to the attorney's taste. It may be that Castles and Taping, while prudently avoiding all scandal and public quarrel, had taken advantage of the limitations of the law of libel to say in private to their ex-confidential clerk what they thought of his conduct and character, and that Mr. Greer had neither forgotten nor forgiven the humble-pie that he had been forced to eat on that occasion.

At any rate, the lawyer rubbed his hands gleefully, and went vigorously to work. He assured himself that Sark really did mean to be as good as his word in saying that, when matters should be ripe for such a step, he would come into a court of justice, sacrificing his own liberty that he might help to bring Lord Ulswater to the scaffold. "The heir will pay well, I don't doubt. Being an infant, he must sue by *prochain ami*; but in any case, we shall get costs out of

the estate, and a round sum over," said Greer, sanguine of success.—"Now for the deposition of that old man.—Which hospital did you mention, Mr. Sark?—Very good. It is out of the city boundary, and we must have a Middlesex magistrate. Not a stipendiary — too much fuss—always fight shy of a police-court — an unpaid justice answers one's purpose better."

A Middlesex magistrate was provided, in the shape of Maltby Starriker, Esq., first cousin to the junior partner, and a resident in Talbot Square, W.; not a very uncommon type of the class of persons whom the richest and best educated community in the world is content to hail as its magistracy. Mr. Starriker was a retired distiller, a heavy, elderly young man, with a fat, white face, and a melancholy look, as if the *elixir mortis* in which he dealed, "Starriker's London Brandy," had flooded his brains and damped his spirits. His father had made money by this fiery cordial; and the son, as owner of many Marylebone public-houses, had been powerful enough over elections to be conciliated by a justiceship of the peace. He

was what is called a practical man, saving half his income, always on the bench at Quarter Sessions, a visiting magistrate, and on the committee for everything—jails, madhouses, and all the heterogeneous work of the Unpaid; and he was understood to nourish a wild ambition one day to write M.P. and D.L. after his name, and be presented at court in his deputy-lieutenant's uniform as member for Marylebone.

This was the magistrate before whom old Benjamin Huller's deposition was duly taken, and both the attorneys, with Brum and Sark, were present. It had been found needful that the Professor should leave his lurking-place, to provide against the risk that his brother-in-law should refuse to make any revelations, on account of Brum's absence; and, thanks to the precautions adopted, all went well, except for the narrator, who fainted twice during the progress of his story, and at its close fell back upon the pillow, with half-shut eyes and jaw relaxed—nothing but his fluttering breath, and all but imperceptible pulse, proving him still to be of the number of the living.

“He'll never stand in a witness-box to be

cross-examined on that statement!" said Mr. Greer, shaking his head.

Brum was conducted back to his haunt in Westminster, but Sark declined to accompany him. He had work to do, as he told the attorney, but he pledged himself to be in the latter's office at a certain hour on the following Friday; and with that promise, Mr. Greer, who grudged letting the witnesses beyond his immediate reach, was obliged to content himself. "But the boy—you have not told me where he is," said the solicitor as he parted company with the Manxman at the hospital gate: "very awkward if the other party—ahem!"

Sark smiled a sad smile. "It is the only secret I have kept from you, sir," he said, "and, begging your pardon, I'll keep it to myself yet for a bit. The little chap has been ill, but the last news I got of him, through Brum, who went out before he knew there was so hot a pursuit, was good news. On Friday, if all goes as I would have it, I'll bring the true Lord Ulswater to your office, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE STORM.

RATS run from a falling house, the proverb affirms; and however the sceptic may smile at what our ancestors believed regarding those whiskered, larder-robbing rodents, human rats are undoubtedly wise in their generation, and scent the coming ruin with marvellous perception. The St. Pagans servants, and the St. Pagans hangers-on and followers, and the tenantry and labourers on the Carnac estate, and the Shellton shopkeepers, and such of the Shellton small gentry as were not above savouring the tattle of wonder-loving cooks and housemaids, in confidential intercourse with their mistresses at dinner-ordering hours, whispered much concerning the "goings on" of John, Lord Uls-water. Many tongues wagged about him and

his affairs, and the mystery that began to be dimly apparent in connection with him, like the shadowy winding-sheet worn breast-high that Highland seers were wont to mark encircling the spectral forms of those about to die. Men and women thought and said, with a quaint relish in thinking and saying it, that there was something wrong at the abbey.

Whence the rumour had its source it would have been hard to say. Airy tongues syllabled the words, perhaps, but it was none the less true that the once popular peer was getting a bad name among his neighbours. Nobody made a definite indictment against the Lord of St. Pagans. That he had behaved shamefully in the breaking off of his present lady-love's betrothal to that excellent, well-principled young man, Mr. Morgan—that he was answerable for the death of that sweet, afflicted angel, Miss Ruth—that he had driven Lady Harriet to seek a new home for her declining years: these damaging facts were held incontrovertible. But there was a great deal more, much less positive, in which the late insolvent doctor, and the attorney Moss, and the Nixons, name of ill

savour in the nostrils of respectable ratepayers, bore a hazy but discreditable part, always in some unexplained reference to Lord Ulswater. Even his brother's ill health and early decease—even the death of the boy Guy, illogically mixed up with the apparition of the spectral monk and the traditional malediction pursuing the race of Carnac, were jumbled up together with Mr. Marsh's ill-starred fortunes and the arrival of William Morgan, like Banquo's ghost, at the picnic among the ruins. Lord Ulswater was not likely to hear the echo of gossip of this kind. There is that merit or demerit in our modern code of manners, that our reputations may be torn to rags behind our unconscious backs without a single good-natured friend's undertaking the office of interpreter between ourselves and the scandal-mongering commonwealth. He was not a man with whom the most thick-skinned of busy-bodies would have cared to take the liberty of telling him that Shellton was engaged in finding him guilty of a variety of monstrous sins unknown; but he was also too keen an observer not to note how his very grooms whispered together, and how

awkward was the silence that his coming caused in the stable-yard when he strolled in to visit his horses as of old. Lord Ulswater had come back to his home with his right hand wrapped up, and his arm in a sling; and Lady Harriet had heard, and Miss Hastings had heard, and so had everybody of all degrees at the abbey, the Manor, and the watering-place, how the injury had been received. It was at a country mansion, the house of my Lord Shafton, well known for his strict preserving and liberal hospitality, that the accident had occurred. Nothing could be simpler. Lord Ulswater had been asked—his aunt had even seen the letter—to join a large party assembled there for partridge-shooting; he had gone there; a gun, one of those new-fangled breech-loaders, had burst, and wounded him in the hand—a trifling hurt, but inconvenient, and he had come home to be nursed: that was all.

But somehow, this plain, unvarnished tale by no means commanded the universal credence that it deserved. Perhaps Dr. Dennis, who came over, more than once, from Shellton to the abbey, and who was very reticent and con-

strained in manner when Lady Harriet, kind and fussy, intercepted his retreat to ask all sorts of questions such as good old women will ask—perhaps Dr. Dennis may not have been able to keep his patient's secret from the partner of his joys and woes ; and Mrs. Dennis may have confided to her daughters, and possibly a very dear female friend or two, that Lord Ulswater's wound was by no means such as could have been caused by the bursting of a gun, and that the neat story was a gray lie at best.

It must have been bad enough to have one's own dark thoughts for company, to feel that men and women were growing cold and critical towards an old favourite, to look back across a frightful gulf of sin, and onward athwart a widening abyss of coming sorrow, without enduring severe physical pain at the same time ; but Lord Ulswater had this also to bear, and he did not bear it well, though he bore it gaily. His spirits were unnaturally high, now and then, and his courage undimmed, but his temper was more easily ruffled than of old, and he became solitary and sparing of speech. His bandaged right hand, terribly inflamed and severely

injured, caused the master of St. Pagans more torment, probably, than his conscience inflicted on him. He had scarcely ever been ill. He chafed against pain as strong, rich natures are apt to chafe against it. It seemed, this sudden wound and helplessness, an earnest of the fate in store for him—a bad omen, as he, in his heathen heart, deemed it. His mental condition at that time was very strange and sad. It seemed to himself as if his mind resembled nothing so much as a dark pool, fathomless, and holding drowned corpses in its unhallowed depths, over the surface of which gleamed and wandered hellish fires, that threw a baleful glare upon the blackness of the night around. Very dismal and desperate was the heart of John Carnac in these latter days, and the light of his undisciplined thoughts was as weird and ghastly as the hovering witch-flames that scare the peasant passing by the stagnant swamp-mere. But his conscience, strictly speaking, did not gall him, as it would have done in the case of a man not wholly lost. His fears of the future were active. He was quite awake to the prospect of punishment; but of repentance, in

the true sense of the word, or even of that genuine remorse that would prefer suffering and atonement to impunity without chastisement and pardon, he had not a whit. His nerves had been shaken, his imagination had been impressed; his apprehensions of judgment to come on him unsparingly—these were strong with him; but there was nothing more. He was in evil case, of a truth.

Had he been sincere in his love for Flora Hastings, and did he love her still? Or was his ardour that of the child who chases the butterfly eagerly enough, but cares no more for the prize when he has once crushed its dainty gold-powdered wings in the rude clutch of his hand? He did not know; he asked himself the question cynically, and left it unanswered. His feelings were too complex for a plain yes or no to express them. Flora Hastings was very beautiful; he had taken great pains to win her away from a man who loved her; he had conquered, beating Fortunatus Morgan with his reputed millions at his back, and all England for spectators. She loved him, and that was something; but then it was in ignorance. The

Veiled Prophet would not have been very much touched by the devotion of some poor little trembler of a she-proselyte worshipping him afar off, and picturing in her girlish fancy the radiant face beneath those silvery folds. He—the Veiled One—was alone in the secret as to what sort of monstrous visage it was that lurked hidden behind the 'mask, and he alone knew how the weak adorer would fly, shrieking, from the eye-blasting sight, as from the gaze of a basilisk.

But Miss Hastings was a beautiful young woman, and it would be odious to him—he felt that—to resign her to another man. For any such resignation, there certainly seemed no palpable grounds. The preparations for the marriage were going on with alacrity. It had been agreed that Lord and Lady Ulswater should go abroad for their wedding-tour, and the place selected had been Naples, as more seasonable in the late autumn than the Chines, and Undercliffs, and sea-side retreats of the nuptial Isle of Wight.

That the marriage should be early in November was a settled thing. It was not to

be celebrated with any especial splendour. Royalty, even as represented by its youngest scions, was not to grace the ceremony. It had scarcely been considered worth while to bespeak a bishop, even the Bishop of St. Bees, or my Lord of Llampeter. A stray dean, or a roving archdeacon, assisted by a brace of honorary canons, would suffice to tie the knot in such a case. The four bridesmaids were not the most beautiful damsels in the Belgravian marriage-market; and moreover they, all four—Lady Emmeline and Lady Eveline, Miss Maud and Miss Ethelind turned up their little noses at the match, and thought themselves to be placing the bride under an eternal obligation to them—the bride, Flora Hastings, their sovereign but a few months back.

Yes, it was a sad falling off from what might have been, from the glorious flourish of trumpets and clanging of cymbals wherewith Flora, with all her blood and all her beauty, a cousin to everybody, and smiled on by a mighty clan, might have sworn to honour and obey William Morgan, with all his money. Eight bridesmaids would hardly have sufficed for such a pattern

union as that. The carriages of the guests would have encumbered the streets around St. George's, as if a royal drawing-room were being held. The Duke of Dalswinton, or the Duke of Trent, would have placed Macluskie Palace or Churnwood Lodge, respectively, at the service of the happy pair, in case none of the Welsh or English country residences of the bridegroom should have appeared romantic and luxurious enough for such a honeymoon. But now let the culprits—for such Society, with its ice-cold shoulder turned towards them, proclaimed them—now let them marry and go upon their way, and eat their cold mutton, figuratively speaking, in company through life, and be as poor as a lord and lady may be.

Flora Hastings was not mercenary: she had given proof of that in letting go a hand that was heavy with much gold, and in resigning without a sigh the advantages of enormous wealth, the one drawback to which was a husband. But it is only by an almost superhuman exaltation of character, or by the grossest vanity, that the best of us can be indifferent to the praise or disapprobation of those around us, and the glacial

temperature of the world's breath struck a chill to the heart of the poor London belle, acclimated to triumph and adulation. Then, too, grave misgivings assailed her with reference to the man for whom she had given up so many of the world's good things, worldly.

"Dear Lady Harriet," Miss Hastings said on one occasion, when the latter lady was paying one of her rare calls at the manor, "what is all this dreadful mystery? Ah! I know there is a mystery, and I see you know it too. He has no confidence in me. He comes and goes, and looks angry, and harassed, and ill, and tells me nothing. I am sure something is wrong. If it is about money, or anything else, he need not keep it from me, I am sure. He is sure of my sympathy. But he always makes the same evasive answer: Nothing wrong—nothing! And I am to be his wife so soon, and he will not trust me with anything. I only wanted to comfort him—it was for his sake, I'm sure. And indeed, dear Lady Harriet, I am so very miserable!"

It presently appeared that Miss Hastings had some solid grounds for her anxiety. She had

had a letter from a feminine friend, "Mary Glanville," as she called her, but who was known to Debrett as the Lady Mary Glanville, second daughter of His Grace the Duke of Trent, at present on a visit to Lady Shafton at Poyntz. The duchess and her daughters had not intended to go to Lord Shafton's house till much later in the year, but their plans had been changed, and now Lady Mary wrote in a tone of comic disappointment. "I meant," she said, "to have made you jealous, dear, by flirting outrageously with this affianced hero of yours, and lo! he has given us the slip, and most provokingly has written to excuse himself from coming to Poyntz at all. I must therefore wait;" &c.

"So you see, Lady Harriet, he was not at Poyntz at all: and yet that story of the shooting-party, and his wound—what am I to think? I do not like to ask him, but it makes me wretched." And Flora wrung her little hands, and began to cry.

Lady Harriet tried to make light of the affair, and to insist that Flora's friend must be mistaken, or that the mystification must at

any rate be a harmless one. But in her secret soul she felt that all this deception augured badly for her young friend's married happiness.

Lord Ulswater, riding at a slow pace, with slack rein and thoughtful brow, towards Shell-ton Manor, was hardly aware that his eyes rested on a stranger, in a felt hat and rather shabby velvet coat, who was sitting on a stile beside the road, and sketching the old gabled house. An artist, by his dress no less than by the folding-easel and portfolio that lay near him on the grass. His face was turned away, but he was a well-made, active young man, with bright brown hair falling from under the peaked brigand hat that none but an artist would wear. The pencil trembled in his hand as he caught sight of the horseman passing within pistol-shot, and he took a keen but stealthy survey of Lord Ulswater, who recked nothing of him.

Meanwhile, the meditations of the engaged suitor were hardly such as a lover's thoughts might be supposed to be. He rode gloomily

along, unattended, as it was his caprice to be, and one of the men from the manor stable-yard had to hasten out and hold his horse while he was within doors.—“They can prove nothing;” such were the words that dropped unawares from his lips—“nothing. Those two are dead who could have borne witness. But if the law acquit me, the world’s opinion will condemn me. Years afterwards, in some second-rate German spa, or in Italy, tourists will be told that the lonely, sullen-eyed Englishman, shunned by all, is the lord who murdered his nephew. Curse the abbey and all that belongs to it! I should like to burn it to the ground—it was the first temptation to be its master, instead of Jock the Laird’s brother, as the blessed law of primogeniture decreed. I should not have been such a bad fellow but for that—who knows?”

And he rode to the door, and dismounted, and went in, to find Flora low-spirited and pale, Mrs. Hastings frigidly gracious, and his future brother-in-law, the attaché, as morose and disagreeable as only a prig who feels himself injured can contrive to be. And the artist

without, ceasing to draw so soon as Lord Uls-water had gone by, looked after him with haggard eyes bright with hate, and lifting up his slouched hat revealed a face that was the face of James Sark.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD LETTERS ARE UNITED.

THE Manxman's time, since he came down from London to the pleasant little bathing-place of Shellton-on-Sea, had not been wasted. He knew no one, and no one knew him. An artist has opportunities of picking up information which are denied to the members of most professions. A surveyor, a lawyer, or a capitalist, making inquiry concerning some local magnate, is sure to find that his inquisitiveness makes the natives as inquisitive as himself. Does he wish to run a railway through Sir John's park? it is pointedly asked; or is his business with the squire's acres and habits likely to end in a Chancery suit, or an application to Sir James Wilde? Is the stranger able and willing to buy poor Lord Lackland's castle? the present

noble owner of which lives in two rooms of it, much as a mouse inhabits a cheese; and if so, will the grand old Norman pile be converted into a madhouse, a monster hotel, or a colossal cold-water-curing establishment? But an artist, who is regarded by the unartistic world very much in the light of a harmless lunatic, may pry and question as he will, without being suspected of an eye to anything worse than a desire to paint a picture, or to sell one. Therefore, Sark, in his velvet coat and hat of soft felt, was able to learn more of Lord Ulswater and his ways than the best detective within the bills of mortality could have gleaned together in so short a time. Even those visits to Clackley Common and Nixon's Hut, whereof rumour darkly whispered, were mentioned to the wandering sketcher; and those who told of them were little aware that the auditor could give a better guess than the narrator at the real solution of the enigma. The Professor had at last communicated to his ally the fact that the murderer of Stephen Marsh was no other than William Huller, his, Brum's, nephew, no doubt acting in the interest of Lord Ulswater; and James Sark

could easily divine that this bravo lay lurking at Nixon's Hut, out of the way of all ordinary scrutiny. But Bendigo Bill's safety, if possible, had been stipulated for by his old uncle, who was of the old Scottish opinion that blood was thicker than water.

And this is the time to mention a singular dream that haunted Lord Ulswater in his feverish sleep, once, twice, and thrice, and would not be driven away by the exorcisms of a disciplined intellect. John Carnac's sleep, from boyhood up to a very recent time, had been sweet and refreshing, just the sound sleep that belongs theoretically to perfect health and a stainless conscience. His dreams had always been pleasant ones, not vivid strongly-marked visions, but airy trifles that burst like foam-bells dancing down the stream, and leave no trace behind.

This dream was of another warp and woof, no air-spun tissue of fairy pageantry, but a drear web woven of black threads from the Valkyr's spindle. It was such a scene from the shadow-world as might have haunted some old heathen ancestor of the Carnac stock, besetting him

when his blood was growing cold and his step slow, and his notched battle-axe and dented shield hung from the rafters of the hall, and the battered ship in which the pirate had floated up river and creek was a sun-cracked wreck upon the beach of the sea-shore. A grim dream.

Lord Ulswater dreamed that he was standing alone in the dried-up bed of a mountain torrent. The water-course was quite dry, and the stones of it sparkled and shone like the jewels of a monarch's crown in the slanting sunlight. And well might this be so, for every pebble was a precious gem glittering gloriously, and the sands were yellow gold-dust, yielding softly to the tread. Then the dreamer stooped, covetous, and laded himself with a rich burden of the precious stones that lay at his feet, every gem worth a king's ransom. As he picked up the last of them, he heard a low dull roar, like the roll of far-off thunder, growing louder and louder, nearer and nearer, and he knew that the flood was sweeping down upon him, and that he must flee or perish. But he could not flee; his feet refused to obey his will. Rooted to the ground he stood, powerless, motionless, with his

massive load of useless treasure, and could not stir from the spot for all his fears.

Then it came, the roaring, leaping flood, and was upon him with all its waves. Horror! it was not water, but blood, red and warm. It was a stream of blood that hissed in his ears, and bathed his shuddering limbs, and rose and rose, rioting, above his breast, higher and higher, till only his head was above the gory flood, and then his strength came back, and he fought for life, striving to reach the bank. He was a strong swimmer. How the heavy heap of jewels bore him down! With a shriek, he let them fall into the red stream, fighting on, straining every sinew, gaining the bank so nearly that one more effort would place him in safety. What cruel hand is that that drags him down? A woman's hand, cold, clammy to the touch, the hand of one that was dead. A poor little hand, with white fingers cut and gashed by the knife, rose up above the tide to grapple with him as he struggled, and a woman's long dark hair floated up to the surface, and he, loathing and in agonies of fear, was dragged and drawn down beneath the red flood, to meet the dead

face of Loys rising from the depths, close to his; and the torture of that dreadful thing was more than he could bear, and with a smothered cry he awoke, gasping.

It was a frightful vision of the night that awaited John Carnac when he laid him down to sleep, and sleep grew hateful to him, and the earth a place of pain, and his hell had begun for him while the evil he had done was yet new. Meanwhile, his enemy, thirsting and hungering for vengeance, dogged him like his shadow, following his steps, either in the spirit or in the body, and stanch as a sleuth-hound to the track of its prey.

As Lord Ulswater rode so slowly past the stranger artist, with no one else in sight, and but a few yards of space between them, a space that the active Manxman could have cleared at a bound, the two were virtually alone together. The pencil quivered in Sark's hand, and a red film seemed to creep over his eyes, while his heart beat as fast as the wings of a hurt hawk flap the ground. There, within easy reach, was the man who had so wronged him. A spring forward, and his foe would be in his grasp.

But no! A rash and futile attack would but rob him of his revenge. He must perforce be patient. John Carnac's careless attitude, as he sat leaning idly forward in the saddle, his arm still in a sling, did not prevent him from looking lithe and stalwart, the very type of graceful strength. Sark held but little to his life, now that the sunshine had gone out of his life, but he was unwilling to afford a new victory to the handsome homicide, who had hitherto foiled him so fatally. He was without weapons. To rush, unarmed, upon such an antagonist as that, would be as mad as for a man to try conclusions with a lion, with nothing but his naked hands to help him in the death-struggle. For aught he knew, his enemy's right arm might not be really disabled.

Lord Ulswater, then, passed on unmolested; and Sark, gazing after him, took from his pocket the little bundle of letters which old Brum had picked up from the floor of the upper room of the house among the market-gardens, where it had been tossed, unseen, amid the contents of rifled chests and boxes. It was tied with faded ribbon, that had perhaps been worn by Loys.

The widower hesitated to untie it, but he set his teeth hard, and undid the knots. The letters, with the ink of some of them discoloured by age and the moist sea-air, fell in a heap upon the open sketch-book that now rested on his knee. In his hand remained something harder and heavier, wrapped in silver-paper. He removed this, not roughly, but with careful dexterity, and a small picture in a gilt frame was revealed.

A picture indeed, but drawn by no less mighty a limner than the sun—a photograph. No production of some celebrated London manufacturer of likenesses—no sample from the studio of a world-renowned photographer, fattening on the proceeds of his gainful partnership with Phœbus Apollo: this was signed by an obscure dabbler in collodion, a vagrant taker of portraits, travelling the country with a van as Thespis travelled with a cart, but with whom Sol did not disdain to take a share in the business. It was a coloured sun-picture, representing two persons standing together beside a rock-banked mountain-stream—a man and a woman, both young and both beautiful. The first of these, a gentleman, as might well be seen, though dressed in

such a garb as befits a pedestrian among the hills, with creel and knapsack, and an angling-rod in his hand, was a gallant figure to look upon. The second was a handsome, dark-haired girl, simply dressed, with a native grace about her bearing that was very winning. A lissom, lovely creature, in early womanhood, as her companion was in early manhood, but giving promise of a ripper and richer beauty in years to come.

Perhaps the poor photographer had been one of those old ivory-staining miniature-painters, starved out by the camera as postboys by the railway; but at any rate he handled the brush well, and had been careful and discreet with his colours. Loys and the Honourable John Carnac. No doubt, the wandering man of tent and chemicals had done his very best to please the open-handed young gentleman, fishing in Furness, and had brought out his apparatus to the bank of the stream where the young folks were wont to meet, and had kept their secret, and earned his extra pay by extra care and discretion. He had made a good likeness of the tall, noble-looking lad with golden hair, and the

pretty brunette standing near, with one little hand coyly resting on her lover's arm. Loys did not look nearly so much like Jael the man-slayer as afterwards at St. Pagans. It took sorrow, and rage, and hot tears of angry shame, to bring that dark, doomed look upon her fiercely beautiful face.

The widower gazed after the receding figure of the horseman, and then his eyes fell again upon the double portrait, and he ground his teeth, and drew a long deep breath, like a diver rising to the surface. "That fair-faced devil," he said hoarsely, "had he not harmed her enough, years ago!" and he seemed about to crush the picture beneath his heel, but he restrained the senseless impulse of destructiveness. "It cannot feel, this daub!" he said with bitter emphasis. "Even this may aid the evidence. Let us see!" And he began to examine the letters one by one.

Old love-letters are sad reading always perhaps. Is it pleasant to a man, or a woman either, to go through the perusal of the yellowed pages full of vows cancelled long ago, of promises broken, and little sweet quips and turns of speech

whence the savour, and the sweetness, and the wit have utterly departed, and for ever! Here are the fond phrases penned, more years since than you care to count, to the mistress for whom you care as much as for last winter's snow. What a lucky escape you had from her, and with what flower-juice had Puck rubbed your bewitched eyelids as you slept, that you should have laid down your heart for a football for such a jilting, shallow-souled jade as that! Again, here are the few short notes, treasured up along with a withered rose and a kid-glove, white once, but Isabella-coloured now, written to you by that sweet girl who ended by marrying a middle-aged man with a shining bald forehead, and whiskers large and red. Or, if of the opposite sex, there are more lively studies than those of the captain's effusions, with bits of poetry, perhaps, checkering the impassioned prose—the captain's, who turned out so badly in India, marrying the half-caste heiress, and then beating her when her rupees were gone, drinking, gambling, quarrelling, and now to be seen any day on the pier at Boulogne, a broken-down, branded man.

It is painful in another way, too, to re-read the letters that we wrote to those whose love was enduring and faithful, dead long since, or those which their dear hands, never to press ours more, once traced upon the paper that is mouldering too, and is stained and blurred with age. But worst and gloomiest of all is the work of the man who looks over the hoarded correspondence of the dead wife that he loved, and reads the letters she penned to another man in the pale dim past, and those that he wrote to her, and that she has kissed, and fondled, and garnered in her bosom as girls are apt to caress the insensible paper on which the burning words have been traced. Jealousy is a plant of surprising vitality, and can exist even where no love is, save self-love; so that a narrow-hearted man may dislike his wife's child-admirers of school-room days and juvenile balls, and his wife's brothers and sisters, and his wife's lapdog, and all that she ever cared for, save him alone. It is not wonderful that James Sark, glancing over the notes that had once passed between Loys Fleming and Mr. Carnac, was cut to the heart again and again.

Old love-letters should surely be burnt as un pityingly as high-caste Hindu widows were used to be, in the palmy period of Brahmanical observance. They sting like dead wasps, sometimes. Sark was stung by the words that met his eye, and yet they were not greater tell-tales than those that lie lurking in many a desk and many a dressing-case. Why had the poor thing kept these, long after her love had changed to hate? She was a good wife, true as steel. But even good wives sometimes cherish a strange tenderness for some bygone bit of romance, that had better have been dipped in Lethe, and drowned there. He who had been her husband was not unjust to her memory now. She had been very fond and faithful to him; whatever the shadow of evil that rested on her earlier life, as his wife she had done her duty well and honestly. He showed his sense of the fact now, in the care with which he handled those old letters that it was pain for him to read, not rudely crushing them with hasty fingers, but refolding them with gentle touch, as we deal with the dead that we love. For Loys had written them or read them, and her breath

seemed still to be upon his cheek as he turned the pages, and he was tender even of the letters, for her sake.

And presently his patience was rewarded. Written in newer ink, the blackness of which was yet untarnished, was a letter, the cover of which bore the words: "For my dear husband. L. S." The poor girl had written it with some secret presentiment, it would seem, of the violent and fearful fate in store for her. It was an explicit narrative or confession of the part which she had played at St. Pagans as nurse to the late lord's only child, and an avowal of her motives for aiding in the vile conspiracy to make John Carnac heir of all. "It was for the sake of my dear James"—so she wrote—"he was in prison, and we were poor. But I was not quite the fiend John Carnac thought me. The innocent boy smiled as he lay there in his bed, and my heart, that had been so hardened and desperate, was touched somehow—I don't know how—and I had mercy then—who ever showed it to me?" These last words had a terrible significance now, read by the lurid light of the hideous past. Sark read them with dry,

tearless eyes, but he groaned aloud and hid his face.

Before the post closed on that day at Shellton-on-Sea, this confession, under cover to Mr. Greer the attorney, lay among the registered letters destined for London.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EARTH TO EARTH.

"EARTH to earth, and dust to dust!" The handful of loose sand and pebbles rattled on the coffin below, as they were dropped into the open grave, half carelessly, in compliance with custom. The clergyman read the solemn words of the burial-service in a hurried monotone, glad to get a disagreeable duty over as rapidly as was consistent with decency. The ugly suburban cemetery, damp and raw-looking, with its streets of white head-stones, its sprinkling of mausolea or other pretentious tombs, and its numerous mounds, beneath which lay the unnamed dead of the poor, was no agreeable place wherein for a narrow-chested curate to linger on that rainy autumn day. A very humble funeral, unattended by mourners, and as devoid of the

gloomy pomp of plume, and scarf, and undertaker's finery as it was, of the loving train of friends, whose streaming eyes and honest grief not seldom put to shame the worldly faces looking coldly out of the windows of mourning-coach and complimentary carriage.

But there were many spectators present—a crowd ; for it was Loys that was buried that day—the dead woman found murdered in old Vanpeerenboom's wooden cottage among the market-gardens not far off, dwelling hereafter to be shunned as a haunted and accursed house, but the likeness of which, engraved on wood, or etched on steel, figured that week in several illustrated periodicals. The dust that was that day to be restored to its kindred clay was that of poor Loys, on whom an inquest had, of course, been held ; and who had been placed in her coffin by the hands of strangers, without one who cared for her to follow her body to the last earthly resting-place—only that gaping crowd of gazers.

The ceremony, such as it was, was huddled over and done with, and a few spadefuls of the

gravel, just enough to hide the plain coffin from view, were cast into the grave, and then the sexton went off to his dinner, meaning to return and finish his job later in the day. The young curate had taken himself and his chronic cold and wet surplice out of the damp cemetery as soon as the last sentence prescribed by the Rubric had been spoken. The lookers-on dropped off in twos and threes, the children loitering the longest; and then two men, one of whom was dressed in black, and had a crape on his hat, but who had kept quite away among the distant headstones, as if studying the inscriptions, drew nearer and nearer; and the younger of them, breaking from the other's hold, sprang forward, and fell on his knees on the brink of the open grave, sobbing passionately. "O Loys, dear! My dear, dead Loys!"

The children lingering about the gate, in the vague hope that the show of the day, which had been disappointingly tame and soon over, might yet have its after-piece or epilogue, got up quite a little excitement about the conduct of this stranger kneeling by the grave. Their chattering and pointing alarmed old Brum, disconsolate

in the background, and he urged his comrade to retire before he should be discovered. "Once they get the bracelets on you, you're a gone coon!" said the Professor, who had lived with Yankees in his day, and had profited by the intercourse. James did not seem to hear him. He was bending over the yawning pit that held the form of her he had loved so well, and talking wildly, as if his dead wife could hear his words, and rise at his entreaty. It was a melancholy sight to see. There must have been good left in the heart of a man who was capable of such great love. Sark was a wayward, restless Ishmaelite, justly outlawed, a law-breaker and a prison-breaker; but there must have been some redemption possible for him, *quia multum amavit*. A capacity for loving is not universally to be found among the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Many worthy men and virtuous women go through a long life of unimpeachable rectitude, and have no more notion, from their first childhood to their second, of what love means than a blind man has of colours.

"Now Jem, Jem!" Brum almost wrung

his hands ; it was so provoking. He had been persuaded, against his own judgment, to countenance this rash act, this coming to the funeral, and poor Sark had promised to be very prudent, and here he was behaving in this way, calling attention to his presence in that spot, and attracting notice which might prove fatal to the whole plan of the campaign. "Don't be a baby, old chap!" pleaded the Professor; "it don't do no manner of good, none at all. She can't hear you, poor soul!"

"How do you know that?" asked Sark fiercely ; but in a moment more he had out his hand in sign of amity. "You mean kindly, Brum," he said with a sob, dashing away the tears that stood in his eyes and dimmed his sight—"you mean well to me, and you meant well to her, poor lass! And I am a fool and a muff, I know, to run the risk of being collared as James Sark, the forger and the thief, just because the only thing that ever cared a straw for me since my mother's lifetime lies here." He tried to rise, but threw himself down again so frantically that Brum almost thought he was about to fling himself into the grave before him,

and broke out afresh : " O Brum, old man, what matters my liberty to me ? I wish they'd hang me outright, and let me go to her, wherever she is, away from here. Wasn't it enough to be forced to leave her to strangers, to be stared at, and thrust into her coffin, and covered up from men's sight for ever, without being forbidden so much as to follow her to her long home—my dear, my darling !—Let me be, Professor. I care for nothing now !"

All this was immensely interesting to the children, who came nearer and nearer, observant of the strange man's wild gestures, and eager to hear his words, and to know whether he were mad, or drunk, or merely a play-actor, that he spoke and gesticulated thus. Brum turned upon them with a volley of oaths that drove them back, frightened, to the gate, and then following them there, as a new idea struck him, he made friends with them by distributing peace-offerings of halfpence and small silver among them. " There," he said, " go and buy bull's-eyes, or oranges, or something, but don't bother the gentleman there, that's good children. He ain't quite right"—and Brum tapped his fore-

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head—"so don't you get too near him, my kids."

Having bought off his young tormentors with this black mail, and seeing them run in a cluster towards the nearest apple-stall, the Professor went back to James Sark. "Jem," he said, "every minute you stop here is throwing away a chance. The young uns will go talking about and send a lot more to look at the madman in the burying-ground. That gardener fellow, too, he's left off work to watch you. I'll bet a sovereign to sixpence he's turning it over in his stupid head whether you and me are them that the Government has offered a reward for. Once let a whisper reach the police station, and——"

"Yes, you're right," interrupted Sark, drying his eyes, and brushing away the gravel from his clothes as he prepared to rise. "I'm more my own man now." He bent his head, and kissed the earth beside the new-dug grave, as he had kissed the cold face of her over whom it was to lie. "Good-bye, Loys, good-bye, my own!" he murmured, in so low a voice that it escaped Brum's ear; and then he rose to his feet. "I'm

ready to go," he said, turning his face away from the grave.

Brum looked apprehensively at his fixed look and colourless cheek. "Lean on me a bit, old fellow; you're ill," said the sympathetic Professor, who was himself nearer to snivelling, as he called it, in his secret heart, than seemed worthy of a philosopher like himself.

But Sark declined the old man's offered arm. He walked away slowly, and with faltering steps and bowed shoulders, as if age had come suddenly upon him; but he neither spoke nor threw one glance behind him, until the cemetery was left far distant, and the two were in a bustling suburban road, within sight of one of those railway-stations, of preternatural ugliness, which rise like brick-and-mortar giants in the outskirts of London. By this time the Manx-man was walking stoutly and well. It seemed as if every pace that intervened between him and that sad resting-place where Loys had been laid to sleep had taken away something from the weakness that had come upon him in the deserted cemetery. He turned to Brum, and

his eyes were bright, and his voice almost cheerful as he said: "You are a patient mate, Professor. I shan't be ungrateful, old man. A little more patience, and then—— Come and take our tickets, Brum. I hear the train coming to carry us to town."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PASSENGER, OUTWARD BOUND.

“FOR San Francisco direct, the splendid, fast-sailing, British-built clipper-ship *Golden Gate*, A No. 1 at Lloyd’s; George Hopkins, commander. Carries a surgeon. To sail from Liverpool; and has excellent accommodation in chief-cabin, second-cabin, and steerage. For freight or passage, apply ;” &c. This advertisement had been conspicuous in London and Liverpool papers for some time past; and now the great three-master, with her tall spars and fine lines, was clear of the Mersey and the Head, and had cast off her tug, and parted with her pilot, as with all her white sails spread, like wings of a gigantic albatross, she glided off majestically on her long ocean-voyage.

Among the second-class passengers was

Bendigo Bill. Lord Ulswater had kept his word. It was thanks to his patron's skill and his patron's purse that the ruffian was once more launched upon the world. The chase after this man had been a hot one. He was "wanted," and badly wanted, by the Home Office and the Scotland Yard prefect of police. But although a strict watch had been kept upon the outgoing-ships bound for such familiar ports as New York and Philadelphia, no detective's imagination soared so high as to induce suspicion of those occupying the *Golden Gate's* second-cabin. British rogues do not often take ship for California, probably finding the fares heavy, and the market for their hypothetical industry glutted with native talent. And if a fraudulent bankrupt or a bolting bank-clerk might be expected to take refuge in so remote a region, the very expense and mystery of the voyage might be presumed to render it caviare to such a fugitive as William Huller.

The myrmidons of Justice, therefore, some representatives of whom were probably on the Mersey quays that day, took no heed of the silent middle-aged German, with the red beard,

partly grizzled, the Tyrol hat, the spectacles, the braided frock-coat, meerschäum pipe, soiled gloves, and loose boots of patent leather, who came leisurely down to the water-side, a packet of foreign books under one arm, and a heap of cloaks encumbering the other. That High Dutchman, with his combined air of smartness, dirt, and erudition, might have been a doctor, a lecturer, a scientific traveller in quest of new butterflies or lichens from the other side of the world; but he looked as Teutonic as Karl the Great or Ritter Toggenburg. He had a friend with him, an Englishman, unmistakably a gentleman, who was very kind and attentive to the learned foreigner about to quit our shores, and who went on board with him. This gentleman had his right arm in a sling. Lord Ulswater it was who thus escorted this pseudo-German on board the *Golden Gate*. He stayed in the vessel to the last; and when the bell rang, and the cry was "For the shore!" he left the clipper, in company with others who had lingered to press the hands of the friends of whom they had "seen the last" in England surely, perhaps on earth. There were men and

women with wet cheeks, turning back to wave their handkerchiefs, even after the vessel had been towed so far down the river that the farewell signal could not be distinguished by even the keenest eye unassisted by a glass, and children whose father would be half a stranger to them when, after many years, those so near in blood should meet again.

Among this little throng was a young man, with a felt hat slouched over his eyes, and a well-worn velvet coat, out of one pocket of which protruded a small green book, brass-clasped, a sketch-book plainly. Lord Ulswater's eye scarcely rested on this man at all. An artist was nothing new, and in no way interesting to him. Where had he seen just such a strolling fellow as that? In Shellton it was, and not long since, with which thought he dismissed the subject. But as for dreaming that the very hat, and the identical coat of shabby velvet that had been worn by the sketcher who was drawing by the roadside as he rode to the door of the manor-house, were now within arm's-length of him at Liverpool, and were there because he was there, he would have laughed at

the notion as absurd. He would not have been inclined to laugh, had he known that the supposed artist, dogging him like his shadow, watchful of his every movement, yet to all appearance bestowing no attention on him at all, was no other than James Sark.

For now Lord Ulswater, though blindly unaware of the fact, had in a great measure ceased to be in his own keeping, to belong, as it were, to himself, and was followed, and kept ward over, by an unsuspected foe. His confidence was in some measure coming back to him, now that he had got his liegeman, Bendigo Bill, snugly embarked and under-weight for a country where the Queen's writs in criminal process do not run. "The odds are enormous," he thought to himself, "against the brute's return. Taos whisky and swamp-fevers, savage Indians and more savage miners, await my friend yonder: and it is hard if, in some gamblers' free-fight, a stray bullet or bowie-knife does not silence Mr. Huller effectually."

Hope began to whisper in John Carnac's ear, and the music of her voice was welcome. His fears had been all of legal proceedings; not that

he had ever entertained much dread of a conviction, since the only tongue that could betray him was mute for ever, but because enough would be revealed on even the most incomplete trial to blast his fair fame, and to make him a banished man for life, unpunished by the law, but excommunicated from all that makes life worth the having.

At the cost of great personal peril, trouble, and forethought, he had removed the chief stumbling-blocks out of his path. Loys was dead; Marsh was dead. The death of the man did not lie so directly at his door as did the death of the woman. He had been vexed at first to hear of the doctor's fate. His over-zealous servant had gone near to implicating him, just as Henry II.'s over-zealous servants had got *their* royal master into the worst of scrapes by slaying the Archbishop on his own chancel floor. But the affair had gone off unexpectedly well. The man who had rid Lord Ulswater of an enemy was safely shipped off to the uttermost parts of the earth, and no untimely discovery had been made. It was better so. Two very dangerous witnesses were

debarred from bearing testimony against John Carnac, until they should stand up to proclaim his sins upon the judgment-day.

Dupe, dullard that he was, with all his craft and all his subtlety! His eyes were dim, and his ears were deaf to the real sights and sounds of the coming doom. Digging a pit for his enemy, as cunning men, such as he, have done for ages unnumbered, he recked not of falling into it himself, to perish miserably. The bold stroke that was to make him safe for ever was to prove his undoing. For his other misdeeds, Nemesis might have waited to punish beyond the tomb; for the last wrong wrought, the penalty must be paid on this earth, in this life, and in full.

John Carnac had been very successful. The Fiend had served him well in that tacit bargain of theirs. He had no thought of the wild German legend of the hunter who bought the magic bullets, never missing, and won high praise, and a forester's place, and the maiden he loved to be his wife, all with the rifle-balls of the demon's casting, and then—with the random shot that was to be the Fiend's portion, laid the

betrothed pretty one bleeding, dead, at his feet. "Fifty go true, three go askew!" So is it elsewhere than in the Harz Mountains or in the Schwarzwald.

The shabby artist in the velvet coat kept Lord Ulswater well in sight, watching him as he passed through the streets, as he entered his hotel, as he left it, as he made his way to the railway station. With a vigilance that never relaxed, but with a caution that avoided any ostensible act which might apprise his foe of the unfriendly eye that was upon him, the man turned blood-hound for the time, held stanchly to the trail. The Furies of pagan superstition could not have followed the evil-doer with more fell a purpose or more pitiless patience. Yet, fearing nothing, and exulting in his success, Lord Ulswater took his place in the up-train; and in the same train, but in a different carriage, the shabby artist in the velvet coat took his place also. He had entered the telegraph-office shortly before the departure, and had sent a message along the wires, addressed to Greer and Starriker.

CHAPTER XX.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

THE train thundered on, speeding as fast as the panting, labouring giant of steam could urge it, along the iron-way. On it swept, flying, rattling, bounding, in its mad hurry and haste, with rush and roar, down the steep gradients of the line. The gradients were steep thereabouts, a slope sharper than is common, and the engine-driver was doing his very best to make up for lost time, and to save himself from fines. There had been vexatious delay at two stations, and the train was miles away from the point which it ought to have reached, according to *Bradshaw* and the Book of Rules; and therefore this tremendous rush at top speed, without regard to curve or level. "I'll make her do all she knows!" the driver had said to the sympathetic

stoker ; and the engine, like a willing slave, tore and whirled along at a pace not approved of by parliamentary experts.

The line was not the direct line from Liverpool to London, but one of the iron-ways that traverse the midland counties from north to south. Thanks to our liberal ways, the traveller in Britain may generally take his choice of parallel roads to a given goal ; and Lord Ulswater had doubled and twisted, and done his best to blind the trail, so that it was late in the afternoon of the day the morning of which had seen the *Golden Gate* weigh anchor and go down the Mersey, seaward. It was still light, however, for the day was fine and bright, not at all like the rainy forenoon of that dark day of the funeral of poor Loys.

The artist in the loose coat of threadbare velvet, sitting in a carriage behind that in which Lord Ulswater was seated, travelled as he travelled, alighting at junctions, taking fresh tickets, proceeding by the trains on short loop-lines that led to points whence London might be reached without any presumption that the starting-place had been Liverpool, riding behind

Lord Ulswater, ever and always, like Black Care, and as hard to be shaken off. Lord Ulswater had at length noticed this assiduous pursuit, and had been annoyed by it. He looked hard at the man, more than once, as they two waited at some station. The shabby artist could scarcely be a policeman : he had not the stiffness which a drilled and stocked and belted man finds it so difficult to lay by with his uniform. A Private Inquiry Office might have such a beagle in its pay ; but what should a person of that kind want with Lord Ulswater ? It takes a full purse to set Private Inquirers in motion, and there was no full purse on the opposite side. A mere coincidence, most likely.

Ahead lay a bridge, spanning a stream of inconsiderable width, but with high banks, and deep holes where the trout loved to lie, lazily swaying their fins to and fro, and watching the silvery minnows swimming from the gravelly shallows inshore. A pretty stream, with a rocky bed, among the stones of which the water foamed and sparkled merrily, and high above, the alder and the ash, and the holly and the hazel, overhung the steep banks, draped with

purple foxglove and dark ivy—a stream such as may be seen by scores in our northern and western English shires, romantic brooks, claiming sisterhood with Dove, and Greta, and Wye, but unknown to fame, haunts of the nameless Naiad.

The bridge was an old bridge, allowing for the wear and tear which give but a short life to such constructions, and it needed repair. The Company's engineer-in-chief, going on his tour of inspection, had shaken his head at the condition of its iron girders, and had set it down in his half-yearly Report as requiring thorough reparation. In the meantime, it was suffered to afford a prize specimen of the glorious uncertainty of railway management. The Secretary was unwilling to add the cost of repairs for the bridge to the already heavy bills for work and improvements: he had been manipulating his accounts very carefully and painfully, and he did not wish, nor did the directors wish, to add a feather to the camel-load of expenses under which the sulky shareholders groaned. He had to face the shareholders at a meeting very shortly, and the better the small balance and the infinitesimal dividend showed, the better; so the

word was given to patch up the rickety bridge with temporary props and struts of timber ; to caution the engine-drivers on the duty of crossing it at a slackened pace, and——

Crash ! There was a roar and a groan, and a grinding, breaking, snapping, and straining of overtasked iron, rending of tortured timber, creaking and fall of wooden beams ; and then a half-heard clamour of terrified human voices, mocked, as it seemed, by the long scream of the steam-whistle that the startled engine-driver sounded, he knew not why, in his panic. The bridge rocked and reeled, bent down, surged up, splitting into fragments, and with the engine and tender, and two-thirds of the carriages, went headlong down upon the rocks of the stream. The bridge had broken at last. With a sickening crash, down went all those tons of wood and iron, and the shrieking human freight, down into the frothing stream.

Two carriages, however, and the guard's van, closing the train, escaped scot-free. The coupling-chains and screws had snapped in twain, and they were left standing, alone and safe, on the very brink of the gulf, off the rails indeed, but

upright and uninjured. The artist in the frayed velvet coat was in one of these carriages.

A dreadful scene it was. Juggernaut—the Juggernaut of irresponsible officialism — was served well that day, and had his blood-sacrifice to the full. It was a light train, and half empty, but there was enough of ghastly horror to warrant the newspapers in announcing it, as they afterwards did, in the most conspicuous of capitals, and with copious details. Death and wounds, and pain and despairing fear ran riot amid that hapless company of travellers; for the mounds of broken carriages and trucks, and the shattered engine, hissing hot, and exploding like a shell from a mortar, as the cold water closed over its boiler—these heaps of material together formed a dam, checking the flow of the brook, and causing it to grow rapidly deeper, so that those not crushed, or torn, or scalded by the heated water that was hurled around, were yet in dire danger of being drowned as they lay trapped among the fragments of the train.

A dreadful scene. The screams of those in mortal terror blended with the wail of agony or the moan of feebleness and suffering, and the

shouts and exclamations of the few unhurt, and who now scrambled from their carriages, and hurried to the rescue of those below. With all its horrors, the spectacle had one redeeming feature—selfishness had little or no scope there. Men, and women too, that had crawled or had been dragged with much ado, bruised and bleeding, from amid the ruins of some wrecked carriage, lost no time in idle moans, but were active in rendering help to those worse off. As for those who had escaped the fall, they made their way in reckless haste down the steep bank and worked eagerly, desperately, to tear away the masses of timber and iron beneath which some groaning victim lay, or to assist the half-drowned inmates of the carriages to draw themselves, with broken bones and faces disfigured, out of their prisons, into which the water was pouring.

Very great gallantry, devotion, and humanity did these volunteer workers display, though what with the excitement of the rescuers, and the piteous cries of women seeking a husband, a child, or a parent, amid that panorama of devastation, misery, and anguish, a cool head was

needed by any one who should exhibit presence of mind. Luckily, the guard had such a head ; and while others were toiling frantically, with no guide but their generous instincts, he waded the water, and climbing the opposite bank, ran along the line, a flag in his hand, to give the danger-signal to a down-train due at that spot within a few minutes, and to check the course of which was needful.

Several lives were lost, many persons were frightfully hurt, and not one of the occupants of the fallen carriages but was more or less injured.

The engine-driver's body, much mangled, lay among the rocks, and stains of blood floated on the frothing surface of the deepening stream. In one place, the water had overflowed a broken carriage, forming a tiny cascade as it swirled by, overleaping the dam at this its lowest point. From that carriage, no living human being was ever drawn forth ; those in the only occupied compartment, three persons, were all drowned.

Further down the brook, and at a few paces' distance from the rest of the train, lay the remains of another first-class carriage. It was riven to pieces as to the roof and floor, and

through its breached sides the water, cascading over the dam above, flowed freely. There was a hollow of some depth in the bed of the stream, hard by, hemmed in by rocks, and to one of these a wounded man clung with despairing clutch, his head and breast just visible above the water. Lord Ulswater! He was hurt, but not unto death. The fearful shock of the fall had harmed him less than it had done many of his fellow-sufferers, but he was bare-headed, and there was a narrow thread of blood trickling slowly down from a slight cut upon one of his temples, half hidden by his golden hair, loose and dishevelled now. He was holding on to the rock by his uninjured left hand. The right arm, which he had worn in a sling, hung broken by his side. It was that hurt received in the struggle, several nights ago, in the cottage among the gardens, which had caused the bandaging of the hand, the support of the sling, and ultimately the broken arm, due to the awkward attitude in which it met the blow upon the rocks. This, however, was not the worst of the plight in which Lord Ulswater, hitherto a favourite of Fortune, to all appearance, was now found. He

was pinned down beneath the weight of a great heap of wood and iron that lay half immersed, pressing on his body as he strove to extricate himself; and this weight tasking all his strength to the utmost to support its fatal pressure, threatened to drag him down with it, helpless, to drown in the smooth pool below.

Thus he was found—found by a man who came bounding, hurrying, wading the brook, springing from rock to rock, evidently seeking some one for whom he had hitherto hunted in vain among the dead and dying that were being gradually brought from amid the wreck and ruin above. Whoever had seen this seeker, stayed by no call, or shriek, or prayer for aid, but rushing on upon his quest, would have deemed him to be in search of some one very dear to him, for whose sake he passed others by. But such was not the case. The man wore a shabby velvet coat and a peaked hat of soft felt. He sprang down, knee-deep, into the water. “Are you much hurt?” he asked eagerly, but in a strange tone, of Lord Ulswater.

Lord Ulswater looked up, and knew him for the man who had dogged him all that day—

knew him too, so quick is memory, in the same instant, for the artist whom he had seen sketching the manor-house at Shellton. He made no answer then, but became still paler than he had been before, and fixed his glittering eyes steadily on the new-comer, and so stood, breathing hard beneath the weight of the mass of wood and iron.

"You expect aid from me, Lord Ulswater," said the man in the velvet coat, thrusting back his hat so as the better to show his face. That face was dark with a sudden rush of blood to the hitherto pallid cheeks, and the haggard eyes looked vengefully into those of the wounded man. "Look at me. We are strangers. Can you not read my name, written here in my face?"

There was a pause. Lord Ulswater's nostrils dilated, and his eyes darkened, and his very lips grew white, but no word escaped him.

"My name is James Sark.—Ah, I see you knew it before I uttered the words," said the man, approaching nearer to Lord Ulswater. "I am Loys Sark's husband. It was my wife whom you left dead on the floor of that hut where there was none to help her. And now, John Carnac, lay hope aside, for as I believe

there is a God in heaven above us, so do I believe that you are delivered up into my hands, to pay the deep debt you owe. Look not for rescue; it will not come. Look not for pity; it is dead in me—killed along with my murdered darling. We are face to face at last. You have escaped death this day in many an ugly shape, but you shall not escape *me*."

And then there was another silence, only broken by the deep uneven breathing of Lord Ulswater, striving under the weight of the mass that bore him down—a long and terrible silence. The two men, face to face, gazed steadily on one another, and for a long space neither spoke.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ACCOUNT IS CLOSED.

LORD ULSWATER, lying in the shallow water on the edge of the deep pool, and clinging to the rock with a convulsive clutch that alone enabled him to support the weight of the heavy heap of ruin in which he was entangled, looked up into his enemy's face, and read his doom there. That flush of wrathful triumphs had faded from that face, and Sark, as pale as the foe beneath him, looked cold, collected, and pitiless in his white rage, grimly surveying the man who had so wronged him, beaten, conquered at last. It was an awful moment for both.

But Lord Ulswater, in that supreme hour of despairing misery, betrayed no unmanly weakness. He met the other's glare with eyes that never flinched, and not so much as the quivering

of a lip betrayed emotion. It is one of the strangest anomalies in poor human nature, that with all our fears, and all our shrinkings from the grave and from the punishment beyond the grave, with all our abhorrence of pain, and love of ease, and life-long dread of the common fate, most of us die well. It is not only the martyr, or the saint strong in faith and zeal, that can meet the King of Terrors at the last, unfaltering; not only the hero on the battle-field, or the patriot on the scaffold. The sad records of the Place de Grève, like those of our own Tyburn, tell how steadily and well the vast majority of sufferers bore the worst that cruelty could inflict, and died without a sign of fear. So this Borgia, this monster of wickedness, who has been known through these pages by the name of Lord Ulswater, looked up, smiling, at the threatening foe who stood, scowling, so near him in that dreadful moment of helplessness.

As for Sark, he was as one transformed. The companions who knew him best might have failed to recognise in this pale avenger the good-humoured, high-mettled comrade whom they had owned as something better and more

generous than themselves. His features were set and pinched as if by illness or by pain, and his eyes glowed with the fires of hate till their brightness seemed unnatural. No one knows what a latent volcano the heart of any reputed good-fellow may prove, or what smouldering savagery lies concealed beneath the habitual mask of an easy temper and a genial disposition.

The actual duration of the silence which seemed so long was really brief enough, three minutes or less; and it was broken—that silence—by a loud cry, a call for help, from Lord Ulswater's lips—one long, desperate effort to summon assistance in this dire need. "Help! help!" was the cry, and the sullen echoes from the hollow in the beetling bank above gave back the sound, "help!" as in scorn. No help came. The call was unheeded in the midst of that Babel of shrill screams and moanings, and shouts and clamour, where the few men able to work were tearing at the panels of the smashed carriages, and wading the deepening stream. No hope of attracting attention in the midst of that scene of tumult and dismay! Lord Ulswater made no further attempt to call for

aid, but met the mocking smile of his enemy with a smile of bitter defiance. "So did Loys cry for help, perhaps; you know best!" said Sark grimly. No answer came back to these words, that were at once an accusation and a taunt. The strong white hand, with its jewelled fingers, held the rock in a grasp as of iron, but Lord Ulswater disdained to waste the remains of his strength in fruitless appeals to those who were too busy to hear his call. He had enough to do to bear the burden that weighed him down, and he drew his breath with difficulty.

Sark stood over him, within arm's-length, coldly surveying him as he lay. His foe—the murderer of Loys—was at his feet, straining every sinew of his powerful frame to keep his head above the surface, and perishing slowly, and by inches, as it were, before his very eyes. Here was the man he so hated brought low indeed, and on the very threshold of a lingering and inevitable death. And Sark had pined and longed for this—thirsted and craved for this—for a signal retribution to fall on that loathed head. The blow had fallen; yet James Sark was disappointed. The revenge for which he

had so panted was not so sweet to the palate as it had been to the fancy beforehand. Revenge never is. Of all the joys that turn to dust and ashes in the fruition, gratified vengeance is perhaps the most worthless.

As he stood, watching the dying struggles of this man, whose head was to him as a wolf's head, *caput lupi*, to be struck, and not spared, he could not keep up the heat of his rage as he had done when Lord Ulswater was in the pride of his strength. There lay the hated wretch, with his fatal beauty of face unmarred by bodily suffering or mental pangs, stretched like Prometheus on his rock, enduring, defeated, defiant in his unpitied pain. There seemed to Sark's wayward heart to be something dastardly, something that lowered him in his own esteem even below the level of the slayer of his wife, in seeing this drowning man go down without stretching a hand to help him.

But the image of Loys, dead upon the floor of the old Dutch gardener's cottage, rose up and nerved him afresh. Here, still alive, was the murderer. "Hark you, Mr. Carnac," the Manxman said, stooping over him; "I am wiser than you, with all your cleverness. I

risk nothing, I break no law. No act of parliament forbids me to stand by and see you get your deserts in this world, before you get them in the world to come. I, a jail-bird and a rogue, and your judge and executioner at once, yet I transgress none of the statutes. I shall see that fair false face of yours sink down beneath the water——”

“You are a cowardly cur!” interrupted Lord Ulswater gasping. Perhaps the remembrance of his hideous dream—come true now—stung him.

Sark laughed hoarsely. “You are wrong, Mr. Carnac; I am not a coward. I’ve jumped overboard in the Trades, to pick up a poor child drowning before his parents’ eyes, ay! when the shark’s back-fin was waving above the water, and not a man else of crew or passengers dared make the plunge. I have saved three lives, each time coming off safe, but only by the skin of my teeth, as we sailors say. I never let man, or woman, or child die for want of a helping-hand, as I’ll let *you* die, Mr. Carnac.”

He paused but an instant, and then went on, speaking in a low but very distinct voice: “You

wonder, if you can think of anything but the well-deserved death you are so near to, why I call your Lordship Mr. Carnac. For this reason, sir—you are no more Lord Ulswater than I am—no more a peer of England than you are pope of Rome, and St. Pagans belongs to you about as much as Windsor Castle belongs to me. Your nephew is alive!”

There was surprise, but incredulous, scornful surprise, in Lord Ulswater’s face; but he said nothing.

James Sark resumed: “Your nephew, whom you thought that you had murdered, not by your own hands, but by the hands of Loys Fleming—he is alive!”

Lord Ulswater gave a groan like that of a wounded lion, driven to bay, and bleeding under the spears. “You lie, thief!” he made answer.

Sark’s reply was spoken with a cool bitterness.

“Thief I am. But what are you, John Carnac? I have been a lawbreaker, and if the law gets hold of me, must pay the penalty; but you are worse a thousandfold. I have usurped no innocent child’s inheritance, broken no

brother's heart, blighted no maiden's fame, murdered no infant, butchered no woman. You have done all these things. John Carnac, you are a viler thief than I."

For the first time, a quick shiver, as of cold, ran through Lord Ulswater's frame, and his features quivered, and his eyelids drooped; but he lifted them again, and looked up at Sark, half in defiance, half inquiringly.

"Mr. Carnac," said his enemy, drawing nearer yet, "your nephew is alive, and in the care of those who will help him to his rights. Loys, his nurse, deceived you, and deceived the doctor, when she told you both how the child Guy Carnac lay buried, fathoms deep, in the sea that beats against the abbey cliff. She spared him. We reared him, and cared for him, under another name, in Australia. There are written proofs of this extant, and depositions have been taken before a magistrate. To-morrow, I shall be by appointment at a lawyer's office with the young lord. He—Paul West—I may tell you his feigned name now without fear—is the true Lord Ulswater, and you, Mr. Carnac——Ha!"

For at that instant there was heard the shrill

whistle of an approaching train, then a hurried cry, a shout taken up by many voices, and soon afterwards the tramp of many feet. On they came at a run, these new-comers, eager and willing to render aid to the miserable sufferers in the late accident.

"They shall not save *you*!" cried Sark excitedly. He had in his hand a heavy piece of wood, three feet long or more, which he had caught up in passing among the broken carriages. This fragment, with its jagged edges, made a formidable club at need, and this he now lifted over Lord Ulswater's unguarded head. "Die, you butcher!" he said in harsh accents, whirling back the weapon; but something held back his arm, and the blow did not fall. The good and bad that were in the man were striving for mastery. With all his wrongs and all his hate, he could not strike down this powerless foe, unresisting, looking into his face. The noise of running feet and shouting voices drew nearer.

John Carnac ground his teeth together. His overstrained sinews could bear no more. For several minutes he had upborne a load that would have crushed the life out of a weaker

man, and even his forces were spent. His breath came but in gasps; the cold death-dews were on his forehead. His heart scarcely could beat, and the chill of the last dreadful moments of parting life froze his veins. For the world and all its prizes and glories, he could not have held on longer. The train had come, and rescue had come, but not for him. Too late—too late for all but one thing!

“Sark,” he said, in a broken whisper, “is the boy’s claim—the proof—dependent on your—your help?”

“It is,” answered the Manxman, bending near him. “Take that with you whither you are bound!”

“Not so; tell your own tale to the Master of us both,” cried Lord Ulswater with a sudden fierceness. “Die, fool, as I die!” His right arm, broken, hung useless; but he now let go his hold of the rock, and, with his left hand, made a grasp at Sark’s throat, so quick, and strong, and deadly in its fell intent, that all the Manxman’s activity hardly saved him from that gripe, never to be loosened. As it was, the sleeve of Sark’s coat was ripped up from

shoulder to elbow ; and then, with a gurgling sob, John Carnac, Lord Ulswater, *de facto* in the peerage of England, sank down beneath the surface of the stream, and gasped out his latest breath in those drowning depths of the dark pool.

He was quite dead and cold when they found him lying there, alone.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE PEERAGE THE LESS.

GREER AND STARRIKER were in their office together, and not alone. The presence of both partners, for more than ten minutes at a time, within the compass of their business premises, was of itself sufficient to show that the occasion was abnormally important. For, just as we see some husbands and some wives always apart, so the members of this legal firm had each of them his own line and his own department, to which he adhered tenaciously. Starriker took the broadly humorous business, Greer the genteel comedy. They were very good friends, but they did not meet every day; and Mr. Starriker was emphatically the outdoor partner, preferring to see his clients at public-houses, where liquor might lighten law. To-day, he was in attendance

at the office, carefully dressed, sedate, and silent. "Hold your tongue, Starriker; you are a dab at the witnesses, and good at elections, but I must manage this in my own way, please"—had been the well-meant advice of the senior and less jocular partner.

In the office, as well as Messrs. Greer and Starriker, were three persons. One of these three was Professor Brum, who looked eminently uncomfortable, but who was shaved, and brushed, and washed, to enable him to pass muster in that goodly company. Also there were two strangers—one young, the other old. The junior, who was a dandy of some pretension, was a trim young gentleman of three-and-thirty or thereabouts, with colourless hair and whiskers very neatly arranged, with the loveliest Neapolitan charms rattling on his guard-chain, and a backbone officially stiff. He was the sort of young gentleman of whom it might safely be predicated that his father must be an Honourable Mister, or his mother a Lady Frances; that he had been pitchforked somehow into a private secretaryship in some Government department; and that he was much admired by himself and

the young ladies that he could not afford to marry, as dreadfully satirical and distressingly clever.

Mr. Standish Wintle had, indeed, to his own infinite disgust, been sent from the Home Office to "look into" the Carnac affair, to take counsel with tenth-rate attorneys of no good odour in the profession, and to be brought into personal contact with thieves, coiners, and the like. It was "police business," as he remarked indignantly to a friend and copyist of his own. Worse still, his chief had thought proper to send a legal dry-nurse along with him in the shape of a shrewd gray-headed solicitor, confidentially busy at the Home Office, and who not seldom had the right to call Britannia his client.

Charges such as those against a man of such rank and reputation as the rank and reputation of Lord Ulswater are serious things, having an awkward tendency to recoil upon those who prefer them; therefore, Greer and Starriker had acted with delicacy in this matter, communicating with the Home Office, instead of risking all by a direct application to the county magis-

trates for that sea-side shire where Shellton was situated. The Home Office had responded to the summons, not very willing, but perforce. In our days, and in our country, officials live in mortal dread of the lash of the public press, and have at once a nervous horror of doing too much and of doing too little. It is no disgrace, after all, to a Secretary of State that he should very much prefer his tenure of power to be as a maiden assize. The trying and convicting of a peer of the realm on several ugly charges was what could, under no circumstances, be agreeable in high quarters, and was indeed a painful duty at best. But to be stigmatised as head of the Circumlocution Office has peculiar terrors for the British bureaucrat in these times of thin-skinned sensitiveness to print, and therefore Standish Wintle and the sensible attorney were at the office of Greer and Starriker.

Proofs had been laid before them, proofs not enough, perhaps, for a jury, but quite sufficient to make an investigation of the affair imperative. There was Huller's attested deposition. There was the written confession of poor Loys.

There was the gold sleeve-link picked up from the floor of the Dutch gardener's wooden hut in which the murdered woman had been found. There were two scraps of notes in the handwriting of the deceased Stephen Marsh, M.R.C.S., addressed to Loys, and relating to the affair. Brum, apprised by the telegram sent by James Sark that his nephew Bendigo Bill was safe, had made what he called a clean breast of all he knew, without, however, mentioning the garotter by name. The sensible lawyer shook his gray head, and even the super-fine Standish admitted that the case had a dark look.

So they waited. Sark it was for whose coming they waited. No one, not even Brum, had seen the Manxman since his return from Liverpool, but he had telegraphed a second message to Greer and Starriker, promising to be at the office at the time appointed, and to bring with him the boy, Guy Carnac, the genuine Lord Ulswater, against whose life his near relative and heir-presumptive had practised, and whose birthright had been usurped.

But Sark was behind time. The whole story

of the kidnapping of the young heir, that of the murder of Stephen Marsh, and that of the murder of Loys, had been told and commented upon, and Sark came not. Even the Professor was puzzled, while Standish Wintle was personally aggrieved by the disrespect of the absentee towards his sublime self. Everything waited for Sark, who alone held the clue of these intricate affairs, and who was impatiently looked for as the man who could explain away incongruities, and throw light upon dark places. At last there was a step on the threshold, and a hum of voices, and the clerk admitted the new-comer :

Sark—but so pale and haggard, that he seemed but as a ghost, the ghost of his former self, belated in the daytime. He looked old and ill, and very dejected, but his bearing showed no touch of fear, despite the presence of such a government luminary as Mr. Wintle, baleful to truant prisoners. “I have kept you waiting, gentlemen,” said James, looking around, “but it was unavoidable. I have bad news to tell you. Lord Ulswater is dead !”

There was a general outcry. “Dead !” And

suspicious glances were directed at Sark, who met them without flinching.

He smiled—a sad smile it was. “I see, gentlemen,” he said, in a resolute tone that carried the force of truth with it—“I see you think I killed him. It is known to you all how I hated him, and with what good cause, and——”

“Now, don’t! Now, be careful, my man: I speak in your interest,” interrupted the solicitor who had come in company with Standish Wintle; “don’t do it.” It was distressing to that worthy man to hear a man bear witness against himself, a thing odious to English jurisprudence.

Sark smiled, more sadly still. “Lord Ulswater—or, I should say, Mr. Carnac—did not meet with his deserts in the way you suppose,” he said quietly. “He was in the train that met with that accident at Charnley Bridge yesterday. He was among the killed. I, who was a passenger by that train, escaped unhurt. I saw his body, with those of the others who were drowned, carried to the inn two miles off.—I shall attend the inquest, if you think

proper, gentlemen," the man added, looking steadily in the faces of those who looked at him.

"But the boy?" cried Mr. Greer, with a long face.

Sark shook his head. "There was a saying of my old father's, that I've had cause to bear in mind this day," he said gloomily, fixing his eyes upon the ground, "and that was, that we ought not to do evil that good may come of it. Now I see we were wrong about the little lord. I meant no harm; and Loys, poor sweetheart, meant nothing but kindness, when she and I put the child to school at Clapham, never intending that the young one should be cheated of his own to the last. But we thought it was mighty fine and mighty clever to act so, keeping back the little lord as a finessing player keeps back a court-card, and bringing him to claim his rights just when it suited our game. So much the worse, so much the worse," added Sark, turning his head away.

The rest of those present, all but Brum, exchanged glances. The Professor coughed behind his worsted glove. "Can't you explain yourself, my good man?" asked Standish Wintle,

adjusting his necktie with a peevish air. "This is a very irregular sort of thing, and you will think twice about it, if you are wise, before you trifle with Government."

Brum shuffled with his feet, and coughed again apologetically. "I'm sure, gentlemen, begging pardon," said he, "that Jem Sark don't intend to trifle with anybody. Don't you see he's trying to tell us something, and can't get the words out. I'm afraid I can guess what, eh, Jem?" and the Professor sidled up to Sark, patting his shoulder kindly, as an amiable bear might have done. The Manxman passed the back of his sun-browned hand across his eyes, which were wet and glistening. He lifted his head, and confronted the company.

"Gentlemen all," said James Sark, "I'm afraid I've given you a deal of trouble to no good end. There's no one left alive to be disgraced and pulled down out of his high place that he'd no right to; there's no one left alive to inherit the title that was wrongfully assumed. Guy, Lord Ulswater, that pretty boy, the little fellow his uncle murdered in will, if not in fact—he's dead too. Some other illness—I forget

the Latin name the doctor gave it—laid hold of the child while he was yet weak after the fever; and though the schoolmaster wrote to me, I never got the letter, ranging the country as I did, a hunted man. When I reached the Clapham school this morning, I heard the bad news—the doctor met me coming out—they didn't expect the child to live through the day. And so it proved. He knew me, pretty little chap, and put his innocent face to mine, as I bent over him. "Kiss Aunt Loys for me, Jem; wish dear Loys good-bye." Those were the last sensible words he ever spoke. He didn't know *she* was dead, you see, and I hadn't the heart to tell him. He died on my shoulder, an hour ago, quite gently, like one that falls asleep. And now, gentlemen, the real Lord Ulswater is dead, and the false one is dead too, and I have no more—it seems to me now—to live for or to care for in this world."

CONCLUSION.

It had been James Sark's intention to devote his savings to the purpose of paying for the funeral of poor little Paul West, so called at the Clapham school, as well as the expenses of his illness, and to work his passage, before the mast, to America. But Mr. Heythrop, the solicitor from the Home Office, being good-natured, and acquainted with the great firm of Castles and Taping, gave a hint to those respectable solicitors, which caused them to take the whole burden of cost upon themselves, subject to prospective repayment from the heir-at-law to the Carnac landed property; and there is no reason to believe that the Gloucestershire or untitled branch of that ancient family grudged this expenditure in behalf of one whom they privately acknowledged to have been the legitimate owner of the estates.

St. Pagans passing as of right to the Carnacs of Gloucestershire, Lady Harriet Ashe had necessarily to seek another home. She has

found one in Mentone Crescent, Cheltenham, where she reigns a quiet reign over a pretty large segment of the spinster society of that famous watering-place. She is growing very serious in these latter days, and shakes her head when the name of Flora Hastings is mentioned in her hearing; for Flora Hastings is acquiring the bad eminence of a desperate flirt, celebrated in Paris, Baden, Nice, and Biarritz for the hearts she has flawed, if not broken, for the mischief she has done, and the admirers whom she has led on to a proposal, and then laughed at. She takes a dreadful pleasure in troubling the course of true love, in making engaged men act basely to the betrothed one, and in marring the most judicious arrangements. Chaperons of both sexes are furious with her, and many a Belgravian matron lays the breaking off of her daughter's engagement at Flora's door.

Yes, Flora is much changed, and for the worse. The miserable death of Lord Ulswater might of itself have softened and chastened her wilful nature; but the discovery of his hidden wickedness, exquisitely painful at the time,

afterwards hardened her disposition, and gave a dash of recklessness to her character and conduct, such as often results in tolerably good women from their finding themselves deceived. She gradually developed latent qualities of which her relatives had no previous idea; among others, those of an imperious will and a petulant temper, which gave her a mastery over others, as such wills and tempers usually do. She dragged her mother abroad, much to that lady's disgust, and has never consented since to be brought back to England for more than a month at a time.

Old Benjamin Huller died in hospital. James Sark was careless for a time of everything, ran considerable risk of being retaken, and sent back to complete his term of banishment in Western Australia. From this he was saved, however, partly by the forbearance of the Home Office, which, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, winked at the returned transport's irregular absence from his place of exile, and partly by the assiduity of old Brum, who gave him no rest till they were both clear out of England. They arrived safely in America, and are understood

to be earning an honest livelihood in one of the manufacturing towns on the Susquehanna, where Sark's great practical abilities as a machinist and draughtsman have acquired for him the post of foreman in a factory, with a prospective share in the concern. But he is a broken-spirited man; grave, industrious, unsmiling; quite another person from the merry vagabond of old days. He, too, is reputed to be growing serious, but in another and more earnest degree than Lady Harriet. The loss of Loys has changed him, perhaps for ever.

Greer and Starriker were by no means sent empty-handed away. For a while, indeed, the junior partner was despondent as to any return for trouble and costs out of pocket. But Mr. Greer knew better. He was well aware that men are never so liberal as when a fortune has devolved upon them in so sudden a fashion as to be reckoned as a windfall; and indeed the distant cousins, who now inherited the abbey and the lands, and who are to be baronets as soon as a new promotion adds to the number of that order, and peers, perhaps, if they steer clear of matrimonial and political blunders for a genera-

tion or so, were willing to pay something handsome to keep a public stigma from being affixed to the name of Carnac. Greer and Starriker's black-mail was forthcoming.

But although public scandal was averted, although the death of John, Lord Ulswater, an orator of promise and a nobleman of high character, was deplored in decorous newspaper paragraphs, evil things were whispered abroad concerning the dead man, and in the families of Hastings, Ashe, and Carnac, much was known, and much more was conjectured with tolerable accuracy. The wrong that had been done was never righted; the orphan heir was never openly spoken of, save as Paul West, and the peerage of Ulswater was officially supposed to expire with its late possessor, John Carnac.

THE END.

